

ROCK CREEK PARK ROAD SYSTEM
Rock Creek Park
Washington
District of Columbia County
District of Columbia

HAER No. DC-55

HAER
DC,
WASH
692-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

ROCK CREEK PARK ROAD SYSTEM

HAER No. DC-55

LOCATION: Rock Creek Park is located in the northwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. The park extends along the valley formed by Rock Creek from the National Zoo to the northwest corner of the District of Columbia and is roughly bordered by Oregon Avenue and Broad Branch Road on the west and Sixteenth Street, Colorado Avenue, and Adams Mill Road on the east. The total area of Rock Creek Park is 1,754.37 acres. The combined road mileage is 18.79 miles.

**CONSTRUCTION
DATE:**

The development of the park road system can be divided into three successive phases: the initial development phases under the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park between 1897 and 1912, which resulted in the construction of Beach Drive, Glover Road, Morrow Drive, Ross Drive, Wise Road, and related bridges; the improvement and expansion of the park road system in the 1920s under the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, which included the construction of Bingham Drive, Sherrill Drive, and Joyce Road and the surfacing of outdated waterbound macadam pavements with penetration asphalt; and the renovation of the park road system by the National Park Service in the 1950s to accommodate the demands of modern motor traffic through more substantial roadbeds and pavements, modest realignments, new bridges and lighting fixtures, and underground drainage. The motor road in Piney Branch Parkway was constructed between 1933-1938.

DESIGNER:

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided the primary technical expertise and leadership during the primary construction period prior to 1933, when the National Park Service took over responsibility for park management and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads supplied engineering assistance. Key individuals associated with the development of the road system of Rock Creek Park included Capt. Lansing H. Beach, Lt. Col. Clarence O. Sherrill, and Maj. Ulysses S. Grant III of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Office of Public Buildings and Grounds landscape architects James G. Langdon and Irving Payne, who provided important design and evaluation services in the 1910s and 1920s; and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr, who served as a member of the Senate Park Commission and National Commission of Fine Arts and helped prepare important management plans and design guidelines for the park and parkway.

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PRESENT

OWNER: National Park Service-National Capital Region, U.S. Department of the Interior

PRESENT USE: The roads in Rock Creek Park provide access to the park's scenery and recreation features. Several of the roads, most notably Beach Drive and Piney Branch Parkway, also serve as important elements of the commuter traffic system of Washington, D.C.

SIGNIFICANCE: Rock Creek Park was created in 1890 to preserve a large section of the wooded valley formed by Rock Creek as a "public park and pleasuring ground" for the nation's capital. Rock Creek Park is one of the largest "natural" urban parks in the United States and the only one owned and maintained by the federal government. The park road system was developed to afford access to the park's scenery and recreational areas and to provide opportunities for recreational driving. Rock Creek Park and its road system embody the classic principles of park development and park road design that played a prominent role in the development of the American urban landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several of the park's bridges are historically significant as pioneering American engineering accomplishments and outstanding examples of civic art. The park road system maintains a high degree of historical integrity despite considerable pressure to construct an express thoroughfare through the park in the 1950s.

PROJECT

INFORMATION: The documentation of the roads and bridges in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C., was undertaken as a multi-year joint effort of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a combined division of the National Park Service, E. Blaine Cliver, chief. The project was sponsored by the Park Roads Program of the National Park Service, John Gingles, deputy chief, Engineering and Safety Services Division. Timothy Davis, an employee of the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers working for HABS/HAER in 1996, wrote this overview of the park road system. Davis also wrote the related HABS report on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (HABS No. DC-697) in 1991/1992. Several teams of HABS/HAER historians and architects have prepared drawings and histories of individual bridges and related structures between 1988 and 1996. HABS photographer Jack Boucher and HAER photographer Jet Lowe made large format photographs of associated bridges.

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RELATED STRUCTURES

DOCUMENTED BY

HABS/HAER:

HAER No. DC-6	Connecticut Avenue Bridge (William H. Taft Bridge)
HAER No. DC-10	Shoreham Hill Bridge
HAER No. DC-11	Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Bridge near P Street
HAER No. DC-12	Boulder Bridge
HAER No. DC-13	Ross Drive Bridge
HAER No. DC-14	Rapids Footbridge
HAER No. DC-15	Pinehurst Bridge
HAER No. DC-16	South Waterside Drive Overpass
HAER No. DC-17	Grant Road Bridge
HAER No. DC-18	Old Military Road Bridge
HAER No. DC-20	K Street Bridge
HAER No. DC-21	Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge
HAER No. DC-22	Massachusetts Avenue Bridge (Charles C. Glover Bridge)
HAER No. DC-23	Calvert Street Bridge (Duke Ellington Bridge)
HAER No. DC-24	Woodley Lane Bridge Abutment
HAER No. DC-25	Milkhouse Ford
HAER No. DC-26	Harvard Street Bridge, Old
HAER No. DC-27	Connecticut Avenue Bridge
HAER No. DC-28	Peirce Mill Bridge
HAER No. DC-29	Sixteenth Street Bridge
HAER No. DC-30	Morrow Drive Bridge
HAER No. DC-31	Rolling Meadow Footbridge
HAER No. DC-32	Riley Springs Footbridge
HAER No. DC-33	Bluffs Footbridge
HAER No. DC-34	Boundary Footbridge
HAER No. DC-35	Lyons Mill Footbridge (Devil's Chair Footbridge)
HAER No. DC-36	Saddle Club Footbridge (Shoreham Hill Footbridge)
HAER No. DC-37	M Street Bridge
HAER No. DC-38	Q Street Bridge (Dumbarton Bridge)
HAER No. DC-48	P Street Bridge
HABS No. DC-14	Isaac Peirce House
HABS No. DC-22	Peirce Mill
HABS No. DC-168	Linnaean Hill
HABS No. DC-571	Dumbarton Oaks Park
HABS No. DC-697	Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway
HABS No. DC-777	National Zoological Park

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General Overview/Description

Rock Creek Park is located in the northwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. The park encompasses 1,754 acres of woodlands, clearings, recreation areas, roads, and assorted visitor and administration facilities. The park is roughly centered on the valley carved by Rock Creek, which winds for thirty-one miles from its origins in rural Montgomery County, Maryland to the Potomac River, which it enters between Georgetown and the Watergate apartment complex. In the nine-mile stretch between the Potomac waterfront and the District of Columbia boundary, where Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway are located, the creek cleaves through the rocky strata of the piedmont physiographic region to create an attractively varied stream valley that ranges from picturesque rocky ravines to broader, gently sloping woodlands interspersed with occasional grassy clearings. Rock Creek Park was authorized by Congress in 1890 to preserve a relatively undeveloped area of farms and woodlands to serve as "a public park and pleasuring ground" for the nation's capital. The original reservation incorporated a number of existing farm roads, military traces, and public thoroughfares, but these roadways were not well-suited for providing access to the park's scenic features or supporting its function as a recreation area. Constructing a convenient and attractive road system was one of the primary concerns of early park administrators. Subsequent park managers focused on maintaining the road system, linking it more efficiently with the surrounding urban fabric, and trying to accommodate new technical demands introduced by the spread of automobile ownership and the growth of commuter suburbs. Current park managers continue to address these concerns while attempting to balance traditional use patterns with evolving ideas about the ideal form and function of urban parks.

The development of the park road system can be divided into three successive phases: the initial development phases under the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park between 1897 and 1912, which resulted in the construction of Beach Drive, Glover Road, Morrow Drive, Ross Drive, Wise Road, and related bridges; the improvement and expansion of the park road system in the 1920s under the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, which included the construction of Bingham Drive, Sherrill Drive, and Joyce Road and the surfacing of outdated waterbound macadam pavements with penetration asphalt; and the renovation of the park road system by the National Park Service in the 1950s to accommodate the demands of modern motor traffic through more substantial roadbeds and pavements, modest realignments, new bridges and lighting fixtures, and underground drainage. The development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (1913-1937) and Piney Branch Parkway (1907-1938) were related projects that will be covered in brief in this report. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided the primary technical expertise and leadership during the initial construction period prior to 1933, when the National Park Service took over responsible for park management and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads supplied engineering assistance under a 1926 memorandum of agreement between the two federal agencies. Key individuals associated with the development of the road system of Rock Creek Park included Capt. Lansing H. Beach, Lt. Col. Clarence O. Sherrill, and Maj. Ulysses S. Grant III of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Office of Public Buildings and Grounds

employees James G. Langdon and Irving Payne, who provided important design and evaluation services in the 1910s and 1920; and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr, who served as a member of the Senate Park Commission and National Commission of Fine Arts and helped prepare important management plans and design guidelines for the park and parkway.

The 1990 Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study lists the total mileage for the park road system as 18.79 miles. The standard width for motor roads in Rock Creek Park is 20', though some variation occurs, as the roads were developed over such a long period of time. All the roads within the park are currently operated as two-lane, two-way traffic arteries, without median dividers between opposing streams of traffic except at several heavily used intersections. The standard pavement is bituminous concrete or "asphalt." Cast concrete mountable curves are standard throughout the park road system, with drainage channeled into underground conduit via grated drop inlets and curb inlets. The standard guard rail employed in Rock Creek Park is a steel-backed timber model that meets contemporary safety standards. Various other types of guard rail can be found in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The park's bridges vary considerably, reflecting different dates of construction, varying topographic concerns, and changing technological and aesthetic trends. The oldest bridges tend to be rustic, stone-faced concrete structures designed to conform with the picturesque aesthetics that dominated park development prior to World War II. Postwar spans are generally simpler structures that frankly reflect their modern concrete and steel construction. The 1907 Ross Drive Bridge is an important exception. This unadorned three-hinged reinforced concrete arch was technologically and aesthetically innovative for its day, though the bridge's location makes it difficult to observe the strikingly modern substructure. The 1930s trail bridges that span Rock Creek in various locations throughout the park are also relatively un-"rusticated" reinforced concrete structures. The bridges over Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway are even more diverse. Several of these monumental spans have considerable significance to the development of American civil engineering and the evolution of the nation's capital. HAER has prepared detailed reports on most of the individual bridges in Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. A listing of these reports is provided in Appendix A. Brief descriptions of the individual roads in Rock Creek Park follow.¹

Beach Drive (1897-1900; substantially renovated in 1950s)

Beach Drive is the principle access road in Rock Creek Park. The two-lane roadway winds along Rock Creek for 6.09 miles from the zoo tunnel to the north boundary of the park at the D.C./Maryland line. The standard width of the paved bituminous concrete roadway is 21'. Mountable concrete curbs line the roadway, which is flanked by 4' turfed shoulders. Drainage is

¹ The following technical data on Rock Creek Park's road system is derived primarily from the Federal Highway Administration's 1988 Engineering Study Rock Creek Park (Arlington, Virginia: Federal Highway Administration Eastern District Federal Division, 1988) and William Bushong, Historic Resource Study: Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1990), road mileage figure, p. 180. Descriptions of the roads' landscape character is based on personal observation in the mid/late 1990s.

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provided by a combination of metal-grated drop inlets and curb inlets that feed into storm sewers that flow directly into Rock Creek. The posted speed limit on Beach Drive ranges from 15 mph to 25 mph. Actual design speeds vary from 15 mph to 40 mph. Beach Drive was originally constructed between 1897-1900 under the direction of Capt. Lansing H. Beach of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Sections of the roadway have been realigned slightly over the years and the roadbed was substantially reconstructed in the 1950s.

Beginning at the north portal of the zoo tunnel, Beach Drive follows the east side of Rock Creek, curving along a terrace of fill held in place by a masonry retaining wall, which also serves to channelize the creek and prevent it from eroding the outside of a moderately sharp bend. A steel catchment wall has been embedded in the steep slope on the east side of the drive in order to protect the roadway from loose material falling from the hillside that was cut back severely to construct the roadway. A short section of mortared masonry retaining wall stabilizes another cut slope slightly further up the drive on the same side. This section of Beach Drive was constructed in the mid 1960s in conjunction with the zoo tunnel. Prior to the tunnel's completion, Beach Drive terminated at the National Zoological Park. Motorists used the zoo's internal circulation road on the west side of the creek to wind around the steep bluff below the old zoo administration building and enter the north end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The circuitous route through the zoo required crossing Rock Creek via paved fords at the upper and lower edges of the zoo property. Since the zoo closed at nightfall and high waters often rendered the fords impassable, construction of the zoo tunnel and the southernmost segment of Beach Drive greatly enhanced the roadway's ability to function as a through traffic artery. Park managers and many park patrons consider this "improvement" to be a mixed blessing.

Approximately 800' north of the zoo tunnel an exit on the east side of Beach Drive allows northbound traffic to cross over into the zoo on a modern concrete overpass or climb out of Rock Creek Park and enter Mount Pleasant via Harvard Street and Adams Mill Road. About 200' further upstream, a grade-level entrance on the east side of Beach Drive provides southbound access to the zoo and allows zoo traffic to enter Beach Drive in either direction. Several apartment buildings are visible on the hillside east of the park boundary in this area, especially in winter when the intervening trees have lost their foliage. This is one of the few places where the surrounding cityscape intrudes on the motorist's experience. The flood plain on the east side of Rock Creek broadens slightly in this area, providing space for a parking lot for zoo visitors. The creek separates from Beach Drive in this section and winds through the zoo grounds for several hundred yards. An unsightly chain link fence separates the zoo grounds from Rock Creek Park. As the creek winds north and west, the slope on the east side of the stream becomes steep again, the road and the creek come back together, and Beach Drive is terraced into the hillside, with masonry retaining walls holding up the slope on the east side of the drive and carrying the roadway above the multi-use trail, which winds between the road and the creek. The remains of the old ford can be seen in the creek at the north end of the zoo.

As Beach Drive approaches the Porter Street/Kling Road underpass, it curves sharply

around a rocky hillock. This curve is signed at 25 mph. Numerous scars on roadside trees suggest that motorists have had trouble negotiating this stretch. A guard rail has been erected on the outer edge of the drive at the sharpest segment of the bend, just below the point where Beach Drive passes under the Klinge road grade separation. The reinforced concrete abutments and piers are faced with 1950s-style moderately rustic stone veneer to harmonize with their surroundings and curved to minimize their bulk and visually ease the motorist's passage around the sharp bend. The multi-use trail separates from Beach Drive at this point, crossing to the west side of Rock Creek on a timber bridge. Beach Drive continues along the east side of Rock Creek to Piney Branch. Since the hillsides on the east side of the creek slope steeply down to the water in this section, placing the driveway on the east side of the creek required the construction of another extensive section of masonry retaining wall to create a level terrace above the reach of flood waters. As Beach Drive swings sharply back to the northeast, the motorist approaches the Klinge Road junction, where a confusing and somewhat hazardous array of low concrete traffic islands channel entering and exiting traffic and separate north and south bound travel lanes between Klinge Road and Piney Branch Parkway. Beach Drive widens briefly to four lanes as it approaches Piney Branch Parkway in order to accommodate turning and entering traffic. With the exception of the sharp curve at the Klinge Road/Porter Street grade separation, the overall design speed for the segment of Beach Drive between the zoo tunnel and Piney Branch Parkway is 40 mph.

Beach Drive intersects with Piney Branch Parkway approximately one mile upstream from the zoo tunnel. The parkway enters from the east side of Beach Drive on the south side of Piney Branch. Beach Drive crosses Piney Branch on a late 1950s double-span concrete slab bridge with a total length of 64'. The bridge has a low concrete median strip and simple tubular aluminum railings. An extended railing on the creek side of the structure serves as a guard rail. The outer bend of the creek has been extensively rip-rapped in this area to prevent erosion and retain the fill used to provide additional lane width at this heavily used intersection, which is one of the most congested and accident prone portions of Beach Drive. Several street lamps illuminate the intersection at night.

Above Piney Branch the terrain become more rugged and constricted again. The valley narrows, Rock Creek winds westward in a long S- curve, and design speeds range from 30 mph to 40 mph depending on terrain. Beach Drive remains on the east side of the creek, nestled tightly between the stream and the steep hillsides rising sharply on the right side of northbound traffic. These precipitous slopes are punctuated by picturesque rocky outcrops. At the most constricted section of the gorge carved by Rock Creek, Beach Drive is once again carried along a section of retaining wall and fill. Higher up the slope, a masonry retaining wall carries Park Road, which soon disappears behind a sharp bluff. On the second curve of the "S", where the steepest section of valley shifts to the west side of Rock Creek, the multi-use trail crosses back to the Beach Drive side of the creek at the aptly named Bluff Bridge. The flood plain on the east side of the creek broadens again, creating an attractive shady glen dominated by large well-spaced trees. The creek swings wide to the west in this area as the road curves sharply north and

east again, passing the Jusserand Memorial on the east side of the roadway. This curve is signed at 25 mph and the NPS has erected guard rail and caution signs. The Jusserand Memorial, a carved granite bench with low relief carvings, was installed in 1936 to honor French Ambassador Jules J. Jusserand, who was an ardent proponent of Rock Creek Park. It is the only such formal memorial element in the park and appears somewhat incongruous to most observers.

After passing around the curve above the Jusserand Memorial, Beach Drive intersects with Park Road, which crosses Rock Creek, passes by Peirce Mill, and exits the west side of the park as Tilden Street. The junction of Beach Drive and Park Road is the only intersection in the park with a traffic signal, which is necessitated by the heavy cross-town traffic that uses Park Road and Tilden Street to cut across Rock Creek Park. The bridge carrying Park Road/Tilden Street across Rock Creek, commonly known as the Peirce Mill Bridge, is a three-span plate girder design with an overall length of 178'. The bridge piers and abutments date to 1872, but the superstructure has been renovated several times, most notably in 1895, 1921, and the mid-1990s. The bridge also provides access to Peirce Mill, one of the park's most historic and picturesque structures. Originally constructed in 1829, the water-powered mill operated commercially until 1897. The mill served as a destination for recreationalists before and after Rock Creek Park was established. The present dam was added in 1904 to create an attractive setting for the old stone mill building.² Beach Drive wound along the east side of the pond created by the dam, affording picturesque views that were reproduced in popular postcards. After Rock Creek Park was created a succession of concessionaires operated a teahouse in the mill to provide refreshments to park visitors. The NPS restored the mill to operable condition in 1936. The dam and the mill's 1810 stone coach house were also restored at this time. The interior of the coach house was remodeled in 1971 to serve as an art gallery. Several small parking lots and service roads provide access to the Peirce Mill, Art Barn, and adjacent picnic facilities, which include a rustic stone comfort station. Another parking lot is located across the pond on the west side of Beach Drive. This facility is separated from the main driveway with a turfed divider, as are most of the parking lots along Beach Drive.³

The multi-use trail crosses back to the west side of Rock Creek at the outside of the Jusserand Memorial Curve. The trail remains on the west side of the creek for the next half-mile, passing under the Park Road/Tilden Street Bridge and through the informal recreation areas and parking facilities adjacent to Peirce Mill. Above Peirce Mill, the multi-use trail makes use of a closed section of the old road on the west side of the creek, terminating in a small parking area at the junction of Beach Drive and Broad Branch Road. There is no multi-use trail between Broad Branch and Joyce Road. Cyclists must share the road with motorists during weekdays.

² Historically, the water to power the mill was channeled through a mill race that was filled in at the turn of the century and served as a roadbed until it was closed by the NPS in the 1960s.

³ Information on Peirce Mill facilities is from Bushong, Historic Resource Study: Rock Creek Park, 165-169.

On weekends and holidays, Beach Drive is closed to automobile traffic between Broad Branch Road and Joyce Road, allowing non-motorized recreationalists to enjoy this picturesque stretch in peace and quiet.

Beach Drive maintains a relatively straight course along the east side of Rock Creek for approximately one-quarter mile north of Peirce Mill, where it intersects with Blagden Avenue. Blagden Avenue follows a deep ravine that curves sharply at the east boundary of Rock Creek Park and eventually levels out to join Sixteenth Street. Blagden Avenue carries a heavy load of suburban commuter traffic and this intersection is congested and accident-prone in peak rush hour travel times. The sharply angled intersection with its two small triangular traffic islands is considered substandard by modern safety and engineering standards. The sharp angle of the adjacent bridge over Rock Creek contributes to the safety and traffic flow problems at this location. Prior to 1956, traffic from Blagden Avenue and the east leg of Beach Drive crossed Rock Creek on a paved ford. In 1956 the NPS constructed a 107' long single-span prestressed concrete girder bridge to provide a dependable crossing at this location. Like other contemporary spans in the park, the Blagden Avenue Bridge has a concrete deck with an asphalt wearing surface, modestly rustic gneiss-faced reinforced concrete abutments, and tubular metal railings. At the upper end of the bridge, northbound motorists are confronted by a sudden and confusing intersection where Beach Drive curves sharply to the right and Broad Branch Road leads to the left across a contemporaneous modern concrete bridge that replaced the picturesque old Pebble Dash Bridge that carried motorists across Broad Branch from 1902 to 1956. A swinging metal gate is located just north of the Beach Drive/Broad Branch intersection to block off automobile traffic on weekends and holidays. Federal highway engineers have recommended replacing the existing Blagden Avenue Bridge with a new structure placed on a more convenient alignment.⁴

Between Broad Branch Road and Joyce Road Beach Drive winds through one of the most varied and picturesque, but often constricted and circuitous, sections of Rock Creek Valley. Sight-distances are generally limited, especially in the lower portion of this section, and there are numerous sharp curves that are considered substandard by modern highway engineering criteria. The 15 mph curve at Boulder Bridge is particularly hazardous and is signed accordingly. Beach Drive stays on the west side of Rock Creek for about one-half mile above Broad Branch Road, winding through a twisting narrow ravine that broadens at bends of the creek into occasional moderately flat sections where the NPS has constructed pullouts and established small bays of mown lawn. At the first of these, an interpretive sign calls attention to the ruins of the old Blagden Mill, which are still faintly visible among the natural boulders and ledges of the creek. Continuing upstream, tall trees press in on the roadway and several rock outcrops extrude within a few feet of the paved surface. After a short, moderately straight stretch, Beach Drive bends sharply to the west around a steep bluff that significantly interferes with the forward vision of

⁴ Engineering Study Rock Creek Park, A-50

motorists traveling in both directions, creating one of the most hazardous curves in the park. This sharp curve is followed immediately by the historic Boulder Bridge, whose narrow travel-way, high rock railings, and acute approach curve on the northern end help make this stretch one of the most sustained white-knuckle driving sections of Beach Drive. While Boulder Bridge forces motorists to slow to a crawl, the distinctive, picturesquely designed boulder-clad 1902 concrete masonry arch bridge is probably the most fondly regarded road-related structure in Rock Creek Park and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A low, relatively flat grassy area in the crook of the creek just upstream of Boulder Bridge provides an ideal vantage point to appreciate the structure and observe the designer's intention to mimic the rugged boulders of Rock Creek. Having crossed back to the east side of the creek, Beach Drive curves sharply around another steep bluff before straightening out slightly to provide a rare extended view down the rocky stream bed. Beach Drive hugs the bottom of the steep slope on the east side of the creek, tracing a series of gentle curves and crossing several minor drainages on small stone-faced culverts. Approximately one-quarter mile below its junction with Joyce Road, Beach Drive curves sharply around a rocky ledge. The road builders left a substantial outcrop on the outer edge of the curve when they cut and blasted their way through the toe of this bluff. The narrow passageway between the hillside ledge and the rocky outcrop produces a picturesque effect, but it also poses a significant traffic hazard and is signed accordingly. After passing this outcrop, which is known as Alvin's Rock, both the creek and Beach Drive straighten out again for about 300 yards, offering additional extended views along the streambed. The drive crosses a few more minor intermittent tributaries on small stone-faced culverts and then bends back to the east, separating slightly from the stream, which curves even more sharply before passing under Joyce Road. A larger stone-faced culvert with rustic stone-veneered parapet walls carries Beach Drive over a more substantial drainage just south of the U.S. Park Police substation at the Joyce Road Junction. Located on the east side of Beach Drive, this modest one-and-one-half story rustic "Colonial Revival-style" stone lodge was constructed by the NPS in 1935-1936 to replace a more ornate Victorian structure located in the same general vicinity. While the 1936 structure provides an attractive example of classic NPS rustic architecture that harmonizes well with the park environment, its use as a park police staging facility has transformed the area into an unsightly parking lot. While the parking areas for most visitor facilities are placed at some distance from Beach Drive and separated by substantial parked dividing strips, the parking area and overflow lot for the police substation is located right next to the main park driveway at a highly conspicuous location. The highly visible presence of police cars and private vehicles belonging to law enforcement personnel significantly impinges on the scenic quality and park-like experience of Beach Drive, presenting the most dramatic and unfortunate intrusion of discordant urban elements to be encountered along any of the park drives.

At the intersection of Beach Drive and Joyce Road a rustic stone-faced parapet indicates the presence of a substantial box culvert constructed in 1955 to channel storm water from a dry stream bed known as Luzon Creek. Just west of Beach Drive, Joyce Road crosses Rock Creek on a steel-girder bridge with ornamental cast concrete balustrades. This narrow, two-lane section of Joyce Road was originally part of Military Road but was bypassed when the D.C. Highway

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Department upgraded Military Road into a high-speed four lane artery for cross-town traffic during the late 1950s. The new section of Military Road crosses over Beach Drive on a substantial modern concrete and steel grade separation structure.

North of the Military Road overpass the creek valley broadens and Beach Drive winds in more gentle arcs through moderately hilly but somewhat less rugged and constricted terrain. The multi-use trail resumes at Joyce Road and continues along the west side of Beach Drive before swinging left on Bingham Drive and following the western edge of the park to the District line. Between Military Road and the north boundary of Rock Creek Park, Beach Drive passes by a series of picnic grounds of various sizes located in small intervalles that afford attractive combinations of shady groves and open lawns. A substantial parking lot located approximately 500' north of the Military Road overpass provides access to the first of these picnic areas, which includes a number of picnic tables, a rustic open shelter, and the Joachin Miller cabin, a late-nineteenth century log structure that was moved to the park in 1912. Approximately one-quarter mile north of the Military Road overpass Beach Drive crosses back to the west side of Rock Creek on the Milkhouse Ford Bridge, a single-span prestressed concrete girder structure with a concrete deck and tubular aluminum railings that was constructed in 1956 and substantially renovated in 1986. Chained-off segments of paved roadway lead to the historic Milkhouse Ford, a reinforced concrete crossing flanked by rustic stone benches that is located 200' downstream of the modern bridge. About 800' upstream from the Milkhouse Ford Bridge, another large parking lot provides access to picnic grounds located beneath towering trees on a relatively long stretch of open flood plain. Bingham Drive enters Beach Drive approximately 300' north of this parking lot, curving along an extended ravine to Oregon Avenue, which forms the western boundary of the park. A metal gate is located at the Beach Drive end of Bingham Drive to restrict access on weekends and holidays. The ravine carved by Rock Creek begins to constrict again north of Bingham Drive. Beach Drive and Rock Creek pass between two steep bluffs, then bend back to the east, where the valley widens again, providing space for two modest picnic areas that are located on the east side of Beach Drive above and below Sherrill Drive. Approximately halfway between Bingham and Sherrill Drive, Beach Drive crosses a small tributary known as Pinehurst Branch on a barely perceptible bridge/culvert constructed in 1910-1911 and significantly remodeled in 1958. The 1958 renovation raised and widened the structure and replaced the original rustic stone parapets with utilitarian metal railings. The modern concrete girder bridge carrying Sherrill Drive over Rock Creek just east of Beach Drive is visible to motorists traveling in either direction. Its thin profile, tubular metal railings, and ashlar faced concrete abutments represent the classic Mission 66 era approach to park bridge design.

After winding along the creek bottom for approximately one-half mile, Beach Drive begins to climb out of the valley, sidehilling along a long, steep, curving hillside and crossing several small ravines on substantial earthen fills before reaching the height of land at the junction of Wise Road. Terracing the roadway into the steep sidehill has left raw banks in some places that contrast with the rounded grassy slopes further downstream and accentuate the rugged hilly nature of this section. Rock Creek curves away from Beach Drive in this area, winding in

serpentine curves through an ample flood plain nearly 100' below the roadway and then curling out of sight around the wooded hill on the east side of the road. Beach Drive curves sharply to the east before intersecting with Wise Road. A metal gate is located at this junction to bar automobile traffic from the upper portion of Beach Drive on weekends and holidays. The section of Beach Drive from Wise Road to West Beach Drive is open to automobiles at all times in order to accommodate cross park traffic. Beach Drive curves gradually north and west as it descends from the Wise Road ridge and reunites with Rock Creek at the Kalmia Drive, which carries West Beach Drive (formerly Kalmia Road) over the stream. Constructed in 1958, the Kalmia Bridge is another prestressed concrete girder structure with a single 68' span, tubular aluminum railings, and modestly rustic ashlar faced abutments. Sets of two low concrete-curbed islands channel traffic at the junctions of Beach Drive and Wise Road and Beach Drive and West Beach Drive. As the only route across the north end of Rock Creek Park, this is a heavily traveled section that produces considerable congestion and more than its share of accidents. In the half-mile or so between West Beach Drive and the park boundary at the D.C./Maryland line, the creek bottom widens and the terrain becomes more gentle. Beach Drive winds along the west side of the creek, which curves languidly among tall trees and flood plain vegetation. The mountable concrete curbs that have flanked Beach Drive since the zoo tunnel terminate at the border between the D.C. and Maryland sections of Rock Creek Park.

Secondary Park Roads

Wise Road

Wise Road provides the primary cross-park route in the north portion of Rock Creek Park. Wise Road winds for 0.603 miles from Oregon Avenue to Beach Drive, loosely following the top of the northernmost major ridge in the D.C. portion of Rock Creek Park. It intersects with Beach Drive about 700' south of the junction of Beach Drive and three-quarters of a mile from the Maryland border. The 25'-wide two-lane bituminous concrete pavement with mountable concrete curbs and 4' wide shoulders winds through the tall trees of a mature second growth forest. The general design speed is 40 mph but there is one 35 mph curve. Wise Road has several sections of timber guard rail and about ten grated drop inlets for underground drainage but no major culverts or bridges. Originally constructed in 1900, Wise Road is one of the oldest roads in Rock Creek Park. The heavy use it receives by cross-park traffic creates congestion at peak travel times and the sharp intersection with poor sight distances at Beach Road is a safety concern. In 1988 the FHA suggested realigning the east end of Wise Road to lead directly to West Beach Drive. This would remove cross-park traffic from Beach Drive and eliminate the hazardous intersection. Park managers have not embraced this suggestion. Some management plan scenarios proposed in the 1990s envisioned closing Wise Road to motor vehicles and transforming it into a multi-use trail.

Sherrill Drive

Located on the east side of Rock Creek Park approximately halfway between Military

Road and West Beach Drive, Sherrill Drive provides access from Sixteenth Street and the surrounding neighborhoods. The 0.334 mile-long 22'-wide two-lane bituminous concrete roadway with mountable concrete curbs and 3' shoulders curves sharply as it descends from Sixteenth Street to Beach Drive. There are two curves in quick succession that fail to meet minimum federal design standards. Steel-backed timber guardrail is employed in abundance. The road has traditionally been closed after snowstorms to provide a sledding hill for neighborhood children. Sherrill Drive was originally constructed between 1921 and 1925. The original bridge was replaced in 1962 by a modern prestressed concrete girder structure with a single 79' span, no median, simple aluminum railings, and ashlar-faced reinforced concrete abutments. The Sherrill Road Bridge had deteriorated significantly by the mid 1980s and received major rehabilitation in the early 1990s.

Bingham Drive

Bingham Drive is a major access road from the Chevy Chase/D.C. suburbs to Rock Creek Park. The 24' wide two-lane bituminous concrete roadway with mountable concrete curbs and 3' shoulders winds from Oregon Avenue down a small valley to Beach Drive, a distance of 0.425 miles. Bingham Drive intersects Oregon Avenue about halfway between Rittenhouse and Tennyson Streets and meets Beach Drive approximately three-quarters of a mile north of Military Road and one-half mile south of Sherrill Drive. Bingham Drive has a moderate slope and gentle curves. Its design speed is 35 mph. A small creek shares the same drainage as Bingham Drive, crossing underneath the roadway through a modest stone-faced culvert. A spur of Bingham Drive, now abandoned, veers away from the existing roadway about 500' from Oregon Avenue and curves sharply southwest, connecting to Oregon Avenue approximately 1000' south of the current intersection by means of the access road to the community gardens and park police stables. The NPS is using the abandoned roadway as a storage area for leaves and woodchips generated by park maintenance activities.

Joyce Road

Joyce Road was constructed between 1921 and 1925 to provide a connection from Beach Drive to the Rock Creek Park Golf Course and serve as an access road from Sixteenth Street and the neighborhoods on the east side of the park. The one-half mile long 22'-wide two-lane bituminous concrete roadway with mountable concrete curbs and 3' wide shoulders runs down the ravine formed by Luzon Branch from the intersection of Sixteenth Street and Rittenhouse Street to Beach Drive, which it intersects approximately 500' south of the Military Road overpass. The golf course access road intersects Joyce Road approximately 500' from Sixteenth Street, just before Joyce Road begins to descend into Rock Creek valley via the Luzon Branch drainage. Joyce Road crosses from the north to south side of Luzon Branch on a concrete T-Beam bridge with a 40' span and aluminum railings, which was constructed in 1950. The Military Road overpasses overshadows the bridge and roadway at this location. Just south of the Military Road overpass, a spur road provides access to the east bound lanes of Military Road. Joyce Road winds around a small bluff and is joined by Morrow Drive shortly before intersecting with Beach Drive, where a substantial reinforced concrete box culvert with rustic

stone-faced parapet constructed in 1955 channels storm water under both roadways. Joyce Road extends approximately one-quarter mile west of Beach Drive, where it bifurcates into a complex of connecting roads that provide access to Military Road and Ross Drive. This section of Joyce Road was originally part of Military Road. The designation changed when the D.C. government upgraded Military Road into a four-lane, high-speed cross-park thoroughfare in the late 1950s. The old Military Road Bridge, which carries Joyce Road over Rock Creek just west of Beach Drive, was originally constructed in 1929 and substantially renovated in the 1990s. It is a steel girder bridge with a single 54' span supporting a reinforced concrete deck. The original ornate molded concrete balustrades were badly deteriorated at the time of the 1990s renovations. Rather than replace the traditional formal parapets with modern metal railings, the balustrades were carefully recast in concrete, retaining the historic appearance of the structure. Joyce Road crosses another small drainage on a concrete box culvert with a 32' overall length, 10' span, and simple concrete railings, which is located approximately 500' east of the intersection with Ross Drive.

Morrow Drive

Constructed in 1911, Morrow Drive was one of the earliest access roads from the east side of the park. Beginning at Sixteenth Street at the north end of the Brightwood Recreation Area opposite Kennedy Street, Morrow Drive crosses open fields and then enters the woods of Rock Creek Park, sidehilling in a long, winding descent to the bottom of the stream valley, where it intersects Joyce Road approximately 100' from the Beach Drive intersection. The 22'-wide two-lane bituminous concrete roadway with mountable concrete curbs and 4' wide shoulders is 0.610 miles long and has a general design speed of 30-35 mph. There is one moderately sharp curve halfway down the side of the valley, where the road crosses on a small drainage on an arched stone culvert constructed in 1911. Like Sherrill Drive, Morrow Drive has traditionally been temporarily closed to provide a sledding hill after significant snowstorms.

Glover Road

Glover Road runs from the intersection of Beach Drive and Broad Branch Road to Military Road, providing an alternative route through the middle section of the park. Some segments of Glover Road follow the alignment of old farm roads that predate the creation of Rock Creek Park. Originally known as "Ridge Road" and renamed to honor park promoter and benefactor Charles C. Glover, this was one of the first roads to be developed for recreational driving after Rock Creek Park was created. Most of the current alignment and grading date to 1899-1901. While Beach Drive provides intimate views of the narrow, winding creek valley, Glover Road climbs rapidly from the confluence of Rock Creek and Broad Branch and follows the top of the ridge separating the two drainages, affording a sense of being high above the creek and the surrounding city. Glover Road leaves Broad Branch Road about 500' west of Beach Drive. It crosses Broad Branch on triple-span concrete box culvert constructed in 1956 when the lower end of the road was shifted from its original outlet on Beach Drive. After crossing Broad Branch, Glover Road winds left and then switches back quickly to the right as it climbs sharply out of the creek bottom. Curling around the prow of the hill between the two drainages, Glover

Road continues to climb through deep woods, passing over a minor ridge and then skirting the western rim of Rock Creek valley. The terrain falls off steeply on the east side of the road, but the ridge top to the west begins to broaden and there are several large clearings, including one that is used as an equitation field. There is a small parking area for this facility, along with several pullouts spaced out along the valley side of the road, which may have once provided scenic vistas but are now obscured by heavy tree growth. After passing the equitation field Glover Road bends sharply around another minor promontory and then curves around the top of a ravine before passing the junction of Ross Drive, which leads off to the right and continues to skirt the edge of Rock Creek valley. Glover Road continues to follow the main ridge ascending even higher and passing through several more clearings that began as farmers' fields and are now kept open through regular mowing by NPS personnel. Several more small pulloffs and picnic areas are located along this stretch. After passing by the top of one of the major ravines extending out of the main creek valley, Glover Road separates briefly into two roadways. The east fork continues to climb slightly and provides access to the horse center, nature center, and associated park offices and maintenance facilities. The west fork maintains approximately the same elevation sidehilling along the slope and intersecting with Grant Road, which climbs steeply up a narrow ravine from Broad Branch. The two segments of Glover Road break out of the woods into the broad open area flanking Military Road, coming back together after passing a major parking and picnic area and continuing as one for another 1000' or so to the intersection with Military Road. The 1.425 mile-long section of Glover Road between Broad Branch and Grant Road is one of the narrower two-way roads in the park. It has an 18'-wide bituminous concrete pavement with mountable concrete curbs, metal-grated drop inlets with underground drainage, 3' wide shoulders, and a 25 mph design speed. Steel-backed timber guard rail has replaced old, substandard timber guide rails at hazardous locations. The 0.280 mile section between Grant Road and Military Road widens to 20' and has a 35 mph design speed. The upper fork of Glover Road that provides access to the Nature Center and stables --officially known as "Old Glover Road"-- is 0.283 miles long and 20' wide, with a 25 mph design speed.

Grant Road

Grant Road climbs along a steep ravine from Broad Branch to Glover Road. The 0.368 mile long two-lane bituminous concrete roadway is 18' wide and has mountable concrete curbs, metal grated drop inlets, and 3' wide shoulders. While most of the older drop inlet grates within the park have been replaced with curb inlets or safety grates with slots at right-angles to the direction of travel, the grates on Grant Road are the older type with longitudinal slots, which pose a hazard to cyclists, especially on such a steep and narrow roadway. Grant Road was established as part of the military road system for Washington's outer defense during the Civil War. Following the establishment of Rock Creek Park, it was improved and incorporated into the park road system. Glover Road crosses Broad Branch on an arched stone culvert that is believed to date to this initial improvement program ca. 1898. The arch spans 10' and the overall length of the structure is 21'.

Ross Drive

Ross Drive extends 1.112 miles from Glover Road to the Military Road access ramp just west of the junction of Joyce Road and Beach Drive. It is another artifact of the initial period of park road development, having been constructed between 1902-1903. The narrow, winding bituminous concrete pavement is 18' wide with mountable concrete curbs and 2' wide shoulders. It is open to two-way traffic and has a 25 mph design speed. Ross Drive is one of the least-used roads in Rock Creek Park on weekdays, but it is more heavily traveled on weekends and holidays, when it provides the only north-south route within the central section of the park due to the closure of Beach Drive between Broad Branch and Joyce Road. Ross Drive offers a secluded drive along the western edge of Rock Creek valley. The heavily wooded hillsides slope steeply above and below much of the drive. Extensive stretches of steel-backed timber guardrail are located at hazardous curves and other exposed sections. There are numerous sharp curves where Ross Drive winds around small ridges and several substantial filling operations were required to carry the roadway over the deep gullies leading down in to Rock Creek. There are several small pullouts that may once have offered views over the park, but these have grown in so visitors now enjoy the sensation of being secluded in the treetops high on the hillside above Rock Creek. Approximately 2,000' north of the Glover Road junction Ross Drive crosses a deep ravine on a historically significant concrete bridge. The Ross Drive Bridge was constructed in 1907 and was one of the first triple-hinged concrete arch bridges in the country. The triple-hinged main span is 105' long. There are 30' approaches on either side supported by concrete T-beams. The bridge has a concrete deck and railings. The concrete railings originally had troughs at each end that served as planters, but these were filled in when the bridge received substantial renovations in 1968. The deck was also widened at this time with cantilevered slabs to give its current 22' wide travel surface. The Ross Drive Bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Small pullouts are located on either end of the bridge.

Miscellaneous Access Roads

There are a number of minor access roads within Rock Creek Park and associated units such as Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. A few merit brief descriptions. The Nature Center Access is an 0.234 mile-long loop that provides access from "Old Glover Road" to the Nature Center. It has a 12' wide bituminous concrete pavement with concrete curbs and 1' shoulders and is signed for one-way traffic. The design speed is 15 mph. Boarding Stable Road is an 0.092 mile-long 18'-wide two-way bituminous concrete spur that provides access from the Nature Center loop to the adjacent boarding stables. Stage Road is an 0.308 mile-long one-way access road that extends from Morrow Drive to the Carter Barron Amphitheater and the circulation routes within associated parking areas. It has 15'- wide bituminous concrete pavement with non-mountable concrete curb and 15 mph design speed. The Golf Course Access is a 0.185 mile-long, two-way, 18'-wide bituminous concrete roadway with 3' shoulders that connects Joyce Road and the golf course parking lot.

Piney Branch Parkway

Piney Branch Parkway was developed to preserve this small stream valley leading into the park from the east. It serves as a major access to the park road system and is administered as

a unit of the park. The parkway was authorized in 1907 and the roadway was developed between 1933 and 1938. Piney Branch Parkway is 0.837 miles long and has a 24' wide bituminous concrete pavement with 11' wide travel lanes, 4' wide shoulders, and a 40 mph design speed. It intersects with Beach Drive approximately one mile north of the zoo tunnel and follows the valley formed by Piney Branch to Arkansas Avenue, passing along the south side of the stream as the Piney Branch drainage gradually widens from a deep, narrow ravine to a broad open valley. Extensive sections of masonry retaining wall were required to carry the roadway above Piney Branch in the lower sections of the creek. Masonry parapets line portions of the lower parkway drive. Piney Branch Parkway forms an important component of the traffic circulation of Washington, funneling traffic from areas north and east of Rock Creek Park into Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway via Beach Drive and the zoo tunnel. The main parkway drive passes underneath Sixteenth Street, which is carried across Piney Branch valley by an impressive parabolic arch spandrel-filled concrete bridge with a single span of 125', a maximum clearance of 25', and total overall length of 272'. It is considered to be the first parabolic arch bridge built in the United States. Despite its modern construction, the bridge has a traditional neoclassical balustrade of cast concrete. Ornamental pilasters on either side of the arch give the impression of being conventional structural abutments, though they serve no practical purpose. The abutments on Sixteenth Street are decorated with large bronze tigers sculpted by A. Phimster Proctor in 1910. Piney Branch Parkway also passes under an undistinguished bridge constructed and maintained by the D.C. Highway Department to carry Park Road over the stream valley.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway extends 2.5 miles along Rock Creek valley and the Potomac waterfront from the south border of the National Zoological Park to the north boundary of West Potomac Park. It was authorized by Congress in 1913 and developed between 1916 and 1936. The parkway's principal function is to preserve the lower valley of Rock Creek as a scenic and recreational amenity while affording a convenient, attractive, and efficient route from Rock Creek Park to Washington's monumental core. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway follows the Potomac riverfront from the Lincoln Memorial in West Potomac Park to the mouth of Rock Creek, where it swings abruptly inland and curves along the bottom of Rock Creek valley. The parkway then winds along the tree-lined stream and under a series of impressive early twentieth-century masonry-covered bridges before reaching its official terminus at the tunnel at the southern edge of the National Zoological Park. The parkway is two-and-a-half miles long. The width of the bordering parkland ranges from a narrow grassy strip along the Potomac opposite the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to a more generous corridor averaging slightly more than 500' through most of the densely wooded valley. In the amphitheater-like sections below the Connecticut Avenue and P Street bridges, the parkway broadens significantly to provide an expanse of open lawns bordered by trees and shrubs. Rock Creek valley begins at K Street and rapidly reaches a depth of approximately 50'. This depth is maintained up to the P Street bend, where the valley walls gradually steepen, rising 80' above the stream near Massachusetts Avenue and climbing to 120' in the vicinity of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge.

The waterfront section of the parkway is a gracefully curving avenue flanked by rows of regularly spaced sycamores. It provides expansive views over the Potomac River, but the natural scenery is sometimes overshadowed by the bulky, modernist forms of the Kennedy Center, the Watergate complex, and the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge. Between the waterfront and P Street, the parkway landscape is a uniformly sloped man-made valley, having been reclaimed from city dumps and industrial use through extensive excavation and regrading. Most of the original plantings have been lost, and thick stands of volunteer flood plain species prevail except in areas kept clear by regular mowing. The long, open bank on the west side of the roadway between M and P streets is resplendent with daffodils in early spring. Above Massachusetts Avenue, the original valley landscape is largely preserved and dense forests of mature hardwoods predominate.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is the subject of a substantial HABS/HAER report (HABS No. DC-697) with thirty-six drawings, eighty-one large format photographs, and a voluminous history.

Context: Urban Parks in the Nineteenth Century

By the mid-nineteenth century, civic leaders throughout America began to consider large landscape parks to be essential components of urban design.⁵ At the end of the century, a city

⁵ The following summary is drawn from a survey of primary and secondary sources, including Frederick Law Olmsted, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted. Vol. VI. The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874, ed. David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, The Park and the People: A History of Central Park (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); A Description of the New York Central Park (New York: F. J. Huntington and Co., 1869); Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Annual Reports of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park (New York City: Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, 1859-1869); "Cities and Parks; With Special Reference to the New York Central Park," Atlantic Monthly (April 1861): 416-29; T. Addison Richards, "The Central Park," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 23 (August 1861), 289-306; Commissioners of Fairmount Park, Second Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park (Philadelphia: King and Baird, Printers, 1870); Fairmount Park. Sketches of its Scenery, Waters, and History (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelinger, 1871); Horace W. S. Cleveland, The Public Grounds of Chicago: How to Give Them Character and Expression (Chicago: C. D. Lakey, 1869); Horace W. S. Cleveland, Suggestions for a System of Parkways for the City of Minneapolis (Minneapolis: Johnson, Smith and Harrison, 1883); Horace W. S. Cleveland, Public Parks, Radial Avenues, and Boulevards: Outline Plan of a Park System for the City of St. Paul (St. Paul: Globe Job Office, 1885); Commissioners of Prospect Park, Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, January 1868 (Brooklyn: I. Van Anden's Print, 1868); City of Buffalo Park Commission, The Projected Park and Parkways on the South Side of Buffalo/Two Reports by the Landscape Architects, 1888 (Buffalo: City of Buffalo Park Commission, 1888); Francis Kowsky, ed., The Best Planned City: The Olmsted Legacy in Buffalo (Buffalo, N.Y.: Burchfield Art Center, 1991); Charles W. Eliot, Charles Eliot Landscape Architect (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903); Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks for the City of Boston, Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks for the City of Boston (Numbers 1-16, 1876-1890); Boston, Massachusetts, Department of Parks, Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park and Related Matters (Boston: Printed for the Department, 1886); Charles Mulford Robinson, The Improvement of Towns and Cities: Or The Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901); Charles Mulford Robinson, Modern Civic Art, or The City Made Beautiful (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons,

without a major public park could scarcely claim to be sophisticated or modern, and most major cities were developing extensive park systems aimed at providing a wide variety of scenic and recreational opportunities. Park advocates like Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted asserted that spacious public pleasure grounds containing a mixture of broad pastoral views, genteel promenades, and more rugged scenery were needed to make cities healthier and more attractive places to live. Olmsted, Downing, and their colleagues promoted parks on both practical and idealistic grounds. Parks, according to Downing, "would soften and humanize the rude, educate and enlighten the ignorant, and give continual enjoyment to the educated."⁶ Exposure to natural scenery was thought to be morally and mentally uplifting, providing opportunities for spiritual uplift and aesthetic refinement. Contemplating nature provided an opportunity to examine God's own handiwork and marvel at the beauty, majesty, and organic unity of His creation. At the same time, the analysis and interpretation of scenic compositions in accordance with highly developed aesthetic theories provided an opportunity to demonstrate one's educational background, intellectual abilities, and creative temperament. A well-bred person was expected to be conversant in theories of the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime and to bring this knowledge into play when viewing scenes in the countryside, in spectacular mountain regions, and in the more domesticated forms of urban and suburban parks. Along with providing a medium for conscious spiritual and intellectual exercise, natural and pastoral scenery was believed to act in a more subtle and therapeutic way to counter the frenzied, artificial nature of modern urban life. Olmsted and others claimed that woodland scenes and broad verdant vistas exerted a calming influence on harried urbanites, who could slip into the park for a few hours or minutes of respite from the hectic pace and harsh scenes city streets and modern, commerce-driven culture. Strolling, riding, or carriage-driving through parks clearly offered less elevated physical and social pleasures as well, from the thrilling sensation of speeding along well-maintained park roads to the gregarious enjoyment of crowds, the status enhancing display of costume, horseflesh, and equipage, and the romantic possibilities of chance meetings and loosely chaperoned excursions. According to some observers, the commingling of different social classes that occurred in parks had notable benefits for a democratic society, in that less refined citizens were encouraged to emulate their betters while the informal sharing of space underscored the unity of the body public.

Such social and psychological benefits were matched by economic incentives and improvements in basic public health conditions. Parks were often created in undeveloped or physically degraded areas such as dumps, stream valleys, and hilly suburban tracts, where they replaced physical eyesores, socially undesirable populations, outright public health threats, or large tracts of relatively inaccessible and thus "useless" land with safe and attractive landscapes

1903); David Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Cynthia Zaitzevsky, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1982).

⁶ Downing quoted in Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape, 66.

interlaced with extensive networks of bridle paths, carriage drives, and pedestrian paths. While parks required a significant investment of public funds to acquire and develop, and removed land from potential development and taxation, their supporters mustered convincing arguments that these costs were decisively overshadowed by the economic benefits they provided in the form of increased valuation of surrounding lands and the enhancement of the community's image as a place for business and residence.⁷

New York's Central Park, designed by Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1858, was the pioneering and preeminent example of the nineteenth-century landscape park, receiving widespread acclaim even though its completion was delayed by the Civil War and various local difficulties. Other cities soon followed suit. Within a decade Baltimore had its Druid Hill, Philadelphia was at work on Fairmount Park, and Olmsted and Vaux were designing Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Recognizing that much of the enjoyment of a park was lost if one had to travel through unsightly city streets to reach it, and acknowledging that a single park, no matter how spectacular, was insufficient for the needs of a major metropolis, Olmsted and his contemporary Horace W. S. Cleveland began designing tree-lined carriageways to connect parks with urban centers and with each other. Olmsted and Vaux first proposed such "parkways" for Brooklyn's Prospect Park in 1866. Physically, these initial parkways were little different from conventional formal boulevards, with one or more finely paved carriageways flanked by turfed strips and shade trees. The key distinction between parkways and boulevards was that the former were developed explicitly as elements of comprehensive park systems rather than as isolated urban amenities. Over the next several decades, cities such as Buffalo, Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, and Minneapolis developed extensive systems of parks and parkways extending throughout the metropolitan fabric. By the end of the century, some of these parkways were becoming almost as informal as the parks they led to, with winding driveways and naturalistically placed trees and landscape features. The most notable of these, Boston's Riverway—another Olmsted design—wound along the languorous Muddy River from the end of Commonwealth Avenue to Franklin Park in suburban Roxbury. The Boston park system was also notable for the establishment of a series of metropolitan reservations created to preserve remnant tracts of attractive scenery in the city's rapidly developing suburbs. Begun under the instigation of Olmsted's protégé Charles Eliot, the metropolitan reservations were large tracts of undeveloped land that relied more on existing forest scenery than on the elaborate landscape embellishments common in urban and suburban parks. While existing woodlands were improved through modern forestry practices, streambanks were stabilized, and vistas were cut to open up key

⁷ The best overview of nineteenth-century park development is Schuyler's The New Urban Landscape; Olmsted expressed his views on the function of urban parks most explicitly in Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1870; reprint edition, New York: Arno Press, 1970). Convenient collections of Olmsted's writings on urban parks include Irving Fisher, ed., Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986) and S. B. Sutton, ed., Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscapes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

views, manmade improvements in these reservations were generally limited to the creation of foot and bridle paths and the construction of modest carriage drives.

The emphasis on developing parkways and carriage drives within parks underscored the prominent role that pleasure-driving played in nineteenth-century park culture. Park proposals often emphasized the provision of driveways, illustrations and descriptions of carriageways played a prominent role in park guidebooks, and road construction was often the first priority of park developers. Carriage-ownership was a privilege of the well-to-do, of course, and the devotion of so much effort and expense to the pleasure of the privileged classes left park developers open to criticism, both then and now. Park supporters countered that the public thrilled to the sight of fine horses and enjoyed the spectacle of late-afternoon carriage parades, which were a daily social event in many cities. Most park advocates were members of the carriage-owning set themselves, and knew that their most influential supporters would be as well. The prospect of providing attractive pleasure helped secure passage of park and parkway legislation. The provision of pleasure drives was viewed as one of the primary purposes of park development and no park was considered complete without an extensive system of attractive and well-maintained driveways. Similar attitudes toward recreational driving prevailed in the early days of motoring, when automobiles were used primarily as sporting vehicles. While conflicts occasionally arose when trotting enthusiasts, bicyclists, or motorists used park driveways as race courses, it was not until the 1920s, when the burgeoning number of private automobiles began to overload park roads, that park managers and landscape designers began to rethink the relationship between parks and pleasure-driving.⁸

Origins of Rock Creek Park

The movement to create a park along the valley of Rock Creek began in earnest after the Civil War. Though it was initially conceived as an intensively developed pleasure ground along the lines of Central Park, Rock Creek Park would eventually bear a stronger relationship to the more modestly embellished suburban reservations of the Boston metropolitan park system. The area that was to become Rock Creek Park was a largely undeveloped region of woodlands and

⁸ Arthur A. Shurtleff, "The Effect of the Automobile on the Design of Parks," Landscape Architecture 11 (April 1921): 111-14; Charles W. Eliot, II, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," Landscape Architecture 13 (October 1922): 27-37; S. R. DeBoer, "Automobiles in Park Road Design," Parks and Recreation 6 (May-June 1923): 421-22; S. R. DeBoer, "Automobiles in Parks," Parks and Recreation 7 (July-August 1924): 582-83; Thomas MacDonald, "Modern Road Construction for Public Parks," Parks and Recreation 8 (November-December 1924): 104-08; Arthur A. Shurtleff, Future Parks, Playgrounds and Parkways (Boston: Boston Park Department, 1925); Lee F. Hanmer, Public Recreation: A Study of Parks, Playgrounds and Other Outdoor Recreation Facilities, Vol. 5, Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs (New York: Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1928); Theodora Kimball Hubbard and Henry V. Hubbard, Our Cities To-Day and To-Morrow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929).

small farms, containing a few minor mill seats and several modest country roads.⁹ Most of these roads simply provided access to the farms and mills, but the federal government had constructed a military road across the park area during the Civil War to provide access to the forts and batteries protecting the northwest approach to Washington. The trees were cleared away for a considerable distance on each side of this road to ensure visibility for military operations. The oldest public road in the future park area was Milkhouse Ford Road, which cut across the valley and forded the creek slightly north of the present location of Military Road. Milkhouse Ford Road had evolved from the "Rock Creek Road" noted on Andrew Ellicott's 1793 topographical map of the District of Columbia. After the Civil War, Military Road superseded the old roadway as the main route through and across the valley. Milkhouse Ford Road was renamed Rock Creek Ford Road by 1884 and largely abandoned by the time the park was created in 1890, though the name Milkhouse Ford has survived to designate the sole remaining ford within the park, located just north of the Joachim Miller cabin. Since Rock Creek lay beyond the boundaries of the original gridded street plan of the federal city, the few roads in the park area were independently constructed to provide access to mills and homesites. Peirce Mill Road was originally laid out by County Surveyor Lewis Carberry in 1831. The road led from the Mount Pleasant area to Peirce Mill, crossing Piney Branch on a small bridge, fording Rock Creek at Peirce Mill, and climbing the west side of the valley to intersect with the Rockville Pike. Originally a private road, it was designated a public highway in 1861 and realigned slightly by District of Columbia Highway authorities several times over the ensuing decades. The stretch of road on the east side of the creek leading up to Mount Pleasant was often referred to as Linnaean Hill Road. Joshua Peirce, the mill's proprietor from the 1830s-1860s, renamed his estate Linnaean Hill in honor of the Swedish botanist. Linnaean Hill became a popular picnicking destination and the name was soon applied to the main road connection with the developed portion of Washington. Klinge Road--originally known as "Peirce's Road"--followed a ravine up the west side of the valley a little bit south of the Peirce/Klinge house. This road was also laid out by the county surveyor for Peirce in 1831. Initially a private road, it was graded, graveled, and maintained by D.C. highway authorities by 1839. Another short steep road led from what would later become Adams Morgan to the location of the present zoo. Carberry laid out Broad Branch Road in 1839, also for the convenience of the Peirces. Broad Branch followed the south side of the valley formed by that stream and could be reached by a short connection paralleling the mill race for Peirce Mill,

⁹ Since this report focuses on road-related resources, it will not recount the history of early settlement and milling along Rock Creek, which is ably treated in existing sources such as Barry Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, History Division, 1985); William Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1990); Charles H. McCormick, Milling in Rock Creek Park (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, History Division, 1967); Paul Y. Inashima, Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Archeological Survey Report: An Archeological Investigation of Thirty-One Erosion Control and Bank Stabilization Sites Along Rock Creek and Its Tributaries (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1985); Louis P. Shoemaker, "Historic Rock Creek," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 12 (1909): 38-52; and Zack Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 53-56 (1959): 101-34.

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which left Rock Creek just south of the confluence with Broad Branch. Peirce Shoemaker deeded the roadway to the federal government in 1854, after which it became an official public highway. Blagden Mill Road ran from Broad Branch Road up the east side of Rock Creek Valley to Fourteenth Street. As originally laid out in 1857, Blagden Mill Road crossed Rock Creek just below the Blagden or Argyle Mill and ascended the east side of the valley on a long side slope parting at one point to form two separate roadways before reuniting a few hundred yards uphill. Another minor roadway started up the north side of the valley of Broad Branch and then climbed to the top of the ridge on the north side of the stream, passing several small farms and eventually connecting to Military Road toward the west side of the future park. This road formed the basis of today's Glover Road. None of these early nineteenth century roads followed Rock Creek itself for any appreciable distance.¹⁰

Despite the limited access and private ownership, the area served as a *de facto* vernacular park throughout the nineteenth century. Excursionists would journey along the country lanes or pick their way along the creek on foot or horseback, enjoying the luxuriant foliage, the towering tree trunks, and the ever-changing views of the stream as it rushed over mossy rocks and pooled behind the various milldams. An 1848 newspaper article describing a day of walking and sketching along Rock Creek observed that one could walk for miles along the creek without meeting another human being.¹¹ On Sundays and summer evenings, however, the roads through the park were popular with recreational drivers and other outdoor enthusiasts. The mills themselves were often the objects of picnic parties and other informal outings. The old mills, some of which were already in ruins, added romantic interest to the natural landscape, while the meticulously improved and maintained grounds of the Peirce complex provided an illustration of the landscape gardener's art. Joshua Peirce, the mid-nineteenth century proprietor, was a prominent horticulturalist who raised camellias and other flowers and designed his grounds according to the latest country place fashion propounded by Andrew Jackson Downing in his journal the Horticulturalist and such books as A Treatise in the Theory and Practice of

¹⁰ Information on these pre-park roads is from "History and Status of Roads in Rock Creek Park," typescript dated 25 February 1930, in Margaret B. Stratton collection, National Park Service, National Capital Region, Office of Stewardships and Partnerships and from maps such as Major N. Michler, "Topographical Sketch of the Environs of Washington D.C.," to accompany U.S. Senate, Misc. Doc. No. 21, "Communication of N. Michler, Major of Engineers, to the Chairman of the Committee of Public Buildings and Grounds, relative to a suitable site for a public park and presidential mansion," 39th Cong, 2d Sess., 29 January 1867, original in Civil Works Maps Files, Record Group 77, Cartographic Division, National Archives; xerox copy in Library of Congress Cartographic Division; Andrew Ellicott, "Topographical Map of the Territory of Columbia" (reproduced in Frederick Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation: The History of Planning for a National Capital [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977], 30); and Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study, 46. According to Bushong, Peirce's Road and Peirce Mill Road were originally laid out in 1831, Broad Branch Road in 1839, Blagden Mill Road in 1847, and Military Road in 1862.

¹¹ "A Day in Rock Creek," Washington Daily National Intelligencer, 20 October 1848, quoted in McCormick, Milling in Rock Creek, 32, 41-42.

Landscape Gardening (1841) and Cottage Residences; or a Series of Designs for Rural Villas and their Gardens and Grounds (1844). The elegant surroundings of the Peirce-Kling mansion and the picturesque stone mill building with its adjacent dam and mill pond made this area the most popular destination for nineteenth-century excursionists, who could wander up the creek bed or approach from either side of the valley along well-maintained country lanes. By the 1870s, the District of Columbia was providing funds to maintain Peirce Mill Road and build a bridge across Rock Creek. During the 1860s, a hotel known as Crystal Springs was located approximately 800' east of Rock Creek and a half-mile south of Military Road. Since there was no roadway along the creek, the primary access to the hotel was a winding lane leading from Fourteenth Street. A narrow track led from the hotel along a small stream valley to Rock Creek. This area was prized for its scenic beauty. At the turn of the century, Louis Shoemaker, a Peirce descendant praised "the rugged and picturesque character of the landscape" and characterized it as "the most attractive and valuable portion of Rock Creek Park."¹² Another attraction for pleasure drivers and other recreationalists was the Piney Branch Race Course, one of the Washington area's several harness racing ovals, which was located nearby, just northeast of the Crystal Springs hotel.¹³

While the Piney Branch Race Course provided an opportunity for harness racers to show their mettle, the winding driveways of the Soldiers' Home, located two miles east of the future park boundary, offered Washington's closest approximation of the informally landscaped carriageways of the classic nineteenth-century park. Describing the Soldier's Home in his 1888 Stranger's Guide to Washington City, William H. Morrison observed, "It is one of the most attractive drives about the city, and is much resorted to in pleasant weather. The property comprises about 500 acres and is beautifully laid out in drives, of which there are seven miles, and in lawns, meadows, gardens, and lakes."¹⁴ Until suburban expansion began to encroach upon the undeveloped northwestern sector of the District, excursionists were able to enjoy a variety of recreational experiences and scenic diversions by making use of an informal array of

¹² Letter from Shoemaker to Washington Evening Star 1 September 1903, quoted in Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study, 47-48. Shoemaker also described the Peirce Mill/Kling Mansion area's function as an informal public park. According to Shoemaker, the estate, also known as Linnaean Hill, "was not only the scene of a large and profitable business, but the grounds were artistically treated, the plants, rare flowers and trees were so beautifully arranged that the place was converted into a horticultural and rural park, where the people of the national capital sought pleasure, recreation, and instruction" (Louis P. Shoemaker, "Historic Rock Creek," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 12 [1909]: 45-46).

¹³ The Crystal Springs development was defunct by the time the park was created in 1890, but the race track remained in operation. The land for both was incorporated in the park reservation (Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study, 29-33, 47-48; Shoemaker, "Historic Rock Creek," 45-46; McCormick, Milling in Rock Creek Park, 27-43).

¹⁴ William H. Morrison, Stranger's Guide to Washington City (Washington, D.C.: William H. Morrison, 1888 [Fortieth Edition]), 46.

public and private spaces. To some observers, the natural beauties, picturesque country roads, and scattered minor improvements fulfilled the functions of a public pleasure ground so well that Washington had no need for the extensive--and expensive--park and parkways systems that were being built in other major cities. Reporting on a recent outing in September 1869, a local correspondent for the Saturday Evening Visitor observed:

We enjoyed a devious ride, via Crystal Springs, Brightwood Solders' Home and Bladensburg on Thursday last with a gentleman from New York. The surpassing beauty of the scenery and the fine condition of the county roads called forth from our metropolitan friend expressions of intense delight, "You need no Central Park in Washington," said he, "for nature has provided for rural delights within sight of your doors."¹⁵

Despite such enthusiastic reports, many felt that the federal government should do something to ensure the preservation of Rock Creek and its environs and provide the nation's capital with a true public park replete with varied scenic enhancements and an extensive network of improved carriage drives. Much of this demand stemmed from the city's rapid growth after the Civil War, which produced a growing civic consciousness of the need for parks and related improvements at the same time that residential development began to transform the city's rural environs into a haphazard array of subdivisions.

Washington's population had been rising steadily, tripling in the two decades preceding the Civil War, but the war provided an enormous boost to the city's population, commercial activity, and civic ambitions. The expansion of government activities and the city's appeal as a winter residence for wealthy citizens seeking political favors helped transform Washington from a sleepy southern town into an increasingly busy and sophisticated city. Real estate prices skyrocketed and development began creeping beyond the original city along the routes of horse-drawn omnibus lines. The northwest suburbs were particularly attractive to well-to-do part time residents and middle-class government employees. Palatial mansions sprung up along Massachusetts Avenue, while row houses and more modest detached houses proliferated in newly platted locales such as Mount Pleasant and Brookland. As the route of a major horse-car line, Fourteenth Street served as a stimulus for residential construction in the area to the east of the future park.¹⁶

Concern that development would engulf all the surrounding natural areas, together with the growing sentiment that no major city--much less a nation's capital--could be considered up-

¹⁵ "Country Drives," Saturday Evening Visitor, 4 September 1869, quoted in Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study, 48.

¹⁶ Constance McLaughlin Green, Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 198-212, 295; Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 54-58, 69-70, 102-109.

to-date and attractive without a first-rate public park, produced the initial movement for the creation of a major public park in the District of Columbia. Andrew Jackson Downing's ambitious 1851 plan for redesigning the national mall along the lines of a English landscape garden had offered some promise, but the project was only partially realized and the mall remained a rather barren and uninviting area, surrounded by government buildings, swamps, tidal flats, and a sewage laden canal. The upper valley of Rock Creek offered the most promise as a site for a public park that would provide relief and recreation for local residents while serving as a showpiece of civic improvement that would do justice to the city's status as the nation's capital.

The desirability of reserving a portion of Rock Creek valley as a public park was mentioned as early as 1854, when John Fletcher, a prominent local citizen and owner of the adjacent Kalorama estate, suggested setting aside 300 acres along the creek as a public garden and site for a new presidential mansion. Fletcher praised the natural attractions of the area bordering the creek between Boundary (Florida) Street and the city limits and suggested further improvements to transform the land into an impressively designed park. "The present native wildness of these lands may be pruned and adorned by the hand of art," he suggested, "until the whole shall be one splendid promenade ground worthy of the capital of the nation." While Fletcher may have been motivated by the beneficial effect such improvements would have on the value of his own real estate, he insisted his proposal was motivated by altruistic concern for the welfare of all district residents and the need to provide a suburban residence for the president that would allow him to escape the official atmosphere of the White House. "Now he is obliged to sleep in his office," Fletcher observed, "for the White House cannot be called anything but an office, where the business of the nation is transacted. After the labors of the day, he should have the same privilege as other citizens, of retiring from his place of business to his private abode." The wooded hills and shady glens of Rock Creek valley, Fletcher suggested, provided an ideal site for a new executive mansion, which would be surrounded by an attractively landscaped "President's Park."¹⁷

Various prominent citizens and visitors expressed similar sentiments, both in regard to the creation of a park along Rock Creek and the construction of a new executive mansion, which could either replace the old White House entirely or serve as a summer residence where the president could escape the unpleasant and unhealthy atmosphere of the Mall. Frederick Law Olmsted, who spent a considerable amount of time in Washington during the Civil War while working for the U.S. Sanitary Commission, made numerous excursions along Rock Creek and extolled the area's potential for park development.¹⁸ The Washington Evening Star endorsed the

¹⁷ This proposal appeared in a letter from Charles Fletcher to Mayor John Tower, 14 June 1854 (reprinted in Allen Clark, "John Thomas Towers--Mayor and Printer," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 25 [1923]: 97).

¹⁸ Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to May 1, 1907 (Washington,

idea of a public park along Rock Creek as early as 1865.¹⁹ The first official step toward the creation of Rock Creek Park came on June 25, 1866, when Sen. Luke P. Poland (D-VT) submitted a resolution calling for the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds to investigate the possibility of acquiring a tract of land to serve as a public park and site for a new presidential mansion. The park was to be at least 350 acres in extent and combine "convenience of access, healthfulness, good water, and capability of adornment."²⁰ Three weeks later, following a second resolution that reduced the minimum size to 100 acres, the committee agreed to employ "a practical landscape gardener or topographical engineer" to examine potential sites for the park and prepare a report on the best location and course of development. Rock Creek was not stipulated as the only potential site, but it was clearly the foremost contender in most people's minds. Maj. Nathaniel Michler of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was selected to undertake the task. A West Point graduate, Michler was a brevetted brigadier general who had distinguished himself in the battle of Petersburg, Virginia. His expertise and enthusiasm were such that he was appointed the first Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds when the Army Corps of Engineers was given responsibility for the development and maintenance of the physical infrastructure of the nation's capital in 1867. The report Michler submitted to Congress on January 29, 1867 is not only the first official statement on the development of Rock Creek Park, but a classic encapsulation of the aesthetics and ideology of nineteenth-century parks.²¹

Michler began his report by asserting that the value of public parks was so firmly established that there was little need discuss the matter. "Where so much has been written on so interesting a feature to any large city as that of a park," he asserted, "and where the necessity of public grounds, either for the sake of healthful recreation and exercise for all classes of society, or for the gratification of their tastes, whether for pleasure or curiosity, has become so apparent to every enlightened community, it would seem to be unnecessary for me to dilate further upon the matter."²² Calling attention to the recent development of spacious parks in various American

D.C.: Norman T. Eliot Printing Company, 1907), 3.

¹⁹ Clark, "John Thomas Towers--Mayor and Printer," 97.

²⁰ Congressional Globe 39th Congress, 1st sess., Part IV, p. 3374, quoted in William V. Cox, "Park Improvement Papers No. 7: Notes on the Establishment of a National Park in the District of Columbia and the Acquirement and Improvement of the Valley of Rock Creek for Park Purposes," in Park Improvement Papers, ed. Charles Moore (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 107.

²¹ Cox, "Park Improvement Papers No. 7," 107; Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 78-83; Albert E. Cowdry, A City for the Nation The Army Engineers and the Building of Washington, D.C., 1790-1967 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Engineers, Office of Administrative Services, Historical Division,) 24-25.

²² U.S. Congress, Senate, Communication of N. Michler, Major of Engineers, to the Chairman of the Committee of Public Buildings and Grounds, relative to a suitable site for a public park and presidential mansion, Sen. Doc. No. 21 to Accompany S. 549 (39th Cong., 2nd Session, 1867), 1-2.

cities and lavishing praise on New York's Central Park in particular, Michler observed, "The establishment of parks is exciting great attention throughout the land, and adds vastly to the enjoyment of the public."²³ For the benefit of congressional philistines not yet converted to the value of landscape parks, Michler summarized the prevailing faith in the virtues of intimate contact with nature, contending the proposed park would "cultivate an appreciative and refined taste in those who seek its shade for the purpose of breathing the free air of Heaven and admiring nature."²⁴ Aware that Congress was reluctant to spend money on the District of Columbia, he insisted the park was a wise investment of funds from the standpoint of public health and general civic well-being, not an expensive luxury promoted by a limited few for esoteric and elitist purposes. The establishment of a public park within easy reach of most district residents, Michler advised, was "the most economical and practical means of providing all, old and young, rich and poor, with that greatest of all needs, healthy exercise in the open country."²⁵ To instruct readers unfamiliar with the conventions of picturesque landscape appreciation, Michler provided a brief verbal sketch of the ideal landscape park:

There should be a variety of scenery, a happy combination of the beautiful and the picturesque--the smooth plateau and the gently undulating glade vying with the ruggedness of the rocky ravine and the fertile valley, the thickly mantled primeval forest contrasting with the green lawn, grand old trees with flowering shrubs. Wild, bold, rapid streams, coursing their way along the entire length and breadth of such a scene, would not only lend enchantment to the view but add to the capabilities of adornment.²⁶

Michler contended that all of these features could be found in the upper reaches of Rock Creek valley, enthusing, "With its charming drives and walks, its hills and dales, its pleasant valleys and deep ravines, its primeval forests and cultivated fields, its running waters, its rocks clothed with rich fern and mosses, its repose and tranquillity, its light and shade, its ever-varying shrubbery, its beautiful and extensive views, the locality is already possessed with all the features necessary to the end in view." To the nineteenth-century scenery aesthete, however, even as naturally attractive an environment as the proposed park was still wanting in refinement and beauty. Unimproved nature was merely a starting point for the landscape designer's art. Trees, rocks, brooks, and slopes were not inviolate entities to be preserved for their own sake, but raw material from which to develop pleasing pictorial compositions and produce exhilarating pleasure drives. Michler found "nature diversified in every hue," but noted that it was "needing

²³ Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 4.

²⁴ Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 2.

²⁵ Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 2.

²⁶ Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 2.

but the taste of the artist and the skill of the engineer to enhance its beauty and usefulness." Michler suggested "gentle pruning and removing what may be distasteful, improving the roads and paths and the construction of new ones, and increasing the already large growth of trees and shrubs, deciduous and evergreen, by adding to them those of other climes and countries." After praising the size and variety of native trees, he advised, "Beautiful vistas, artistically arranged, can be cut through them, exhibiting distant points of landscape, while charming promenades can invite the wanderer to seek cooling shades." Michler's report advocated damming Rock Creek in several places to create ornamental lakes and ponds. These artificial water features would add beauty and variety to the park scenery while providing opportunities for such popular park pursuits as boating in the summer and skating in the winter. Whether natural or artificial, the abundance of water in Rock Creek provided ideal opportunities "for the engineer and the artist to display their taste in constructing ornamental and rustic bridges." Michler praised the existing roads across the valley, but in order to make the most of the park's scenic and recreational opportunities, he recommended developing "many miles of drives and rides and walks, all independent of each other, and either open or protected so as to be suitable for the different seasons." He also anticipated the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, advocating the construction of avenues along the creek to provide better access to the park from the center city. Where Michler's report departed most from later conceptions of the park was in the contemplation of developed areas such as geometrical flower gardens, lookout towers, botanical and zoological gardens, formal promenades, and parade grounds. These features were popular components of contemporary parks, but by the late-nineteenth-century, the landscape profession would favor more naturalistic park development that kept formal grounds and artificial structures to a minimum. Michler's initial proposal also advocated a much larger reservation than was eventually approved. His survey extended as far south as P Street and his most ambitious proposal called for a park of 2,540 acres. Acknowledging that this might seem excessive, he provided an alternative proposal that brought the total down to 1,800 acres. Following Congress's instructions, Michler also reviewed several potential sites for a second presidential mansion. The report's conclusion demonstrated which of the two concerns he considered most important. Urging Congress to begin work on the park project as soon as possible, Michler characterized it as "a grand and beautiful undertaking" that should be prosecuted "with the greatest energy."²⁷

With Michler's report as ammunition, Sen. Benjamin Gratz Brown (D-MO), chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, spearheaded the effort to secure congressional authorization for the park. In February 1867 Brown introduced a bill (S.549) calling for the creation of a 2,700 acre park along the lines suggested by Michler. He proposed that Michler, noted engineer Montgomery C. Meigs, and Bvt. Maj. Gen. H. G. Wright be named to a commission entrusted with acquiring the necessary land and reporting to Congress on the progress of the project. Brown rivaled Michler in extolling the virtues of the proposed park.

²⁷ Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 2-4.

Echoing Michler's report, he lavished praise on the existing scenery of Rock Creek while expounding on the area's potential "for adornment and development." Like Michler, Brown envisioned a Central Park-like combination of intensively developed pleasure grounds, scenic carriage drives, and secluded, largely unimproved areas. Brown attempted to impress on Congress how fortuitous it was that all the requirements of a great urban park - "the scenic splendor of shifting views, the life and animation of gay concourse, the uprisen majesty of the forest, the intoxicating gladness of spring flowers, the laugh of the heavens playing through the branches, the shimmer of the waters, the song of birds, graceful forms, inspirations"-- could be furnished at modest expense within easy reach of citizens of the nation's capital. Brown pointed out that such amenities should exert considerable appeal "upon those who come from all parts of this great nation to bend their minds to the dismal science of law-making." He also appealed to his colleagues' sense of national pride by listing the park-building achievements of various European cities and urging them to secure "a national park worthy of our people and our country." While Brown pushed for the full 2,700 acre allotment, he allowed that the boundaries could be reconfigured if necessary to provide a smaller reservation "without abating much the extent of the drives or the beautiful diversity of the views." Observing that the area surrounding Rock Creek would not remained undeveloped for long, he urged rapid action to secure the necessary acreage before escalating land prices sent the cost of the project out of reach. According to Brown, the entire park could be acquired at current prices for less than half a million dollars.²⁸

The Senate passed Brown's bill over objections that the cost of the project was grossly underestimated, but the House tabled the measure and the park project lost its foremost legislative advocate when Brown left the Senate in 1867.²⁹ In his 1868 annual report Michler urged Congress to reconsider the prospect of creating "a grand national park" along the "beautiful and romantic valley of Rock Creek," but no further official action was forthcoming until 1883, when Capt. Richard L. Hoxie, assistant engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, produced a proposal to dam Rock Creek just north of Georgetown to form a four-mile long lake that would submerge most of Rock Creek Valley. The reservoir would increase the city's water supply and serve as the centerpiece of an 8,000-acre public park. Congress did not rule favorably on this suggestion, either.³⁰ In November 1883 several prominent citizens led by

²⁸ Sen. H. Gratz Brown's remarks recorded in Congressional Globe, Part 3, 39th Congress, 2d sess., p. 1577 and reprinted in Rock Creek Park: Information for the Public in Relation Thereto (Washington, D.C.: Judd and Detweiler, 1889), 5-9.

²⁹ Cox, "Notes on the Establishment of a National Park," 108; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park Administrative History, 6.

³⁰ Report of Brevet Brigadier General Michler, Officer in Charge of Public Buildings, Public Grounds, Works, etc. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868), 12; Hoxie's plan described in Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from

local banker, real estate speculator and arts patron W. W. Corcoran addressed a letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia supporting the creation of a park along the upper valley of Rock Creek. Referring to Michler's report for elaboration on the area's scenic qualities, they presented the case for the park largely in economic terms, emphasizing the beneficial influence it would have on real estate values and on the general prosperity and stability of Washington. The letter pointed out that New York's Central Park, Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, and Baltimore's Druid Hill Park had "greatly increased the value of property in those cities and stimulated the influx of wealth and population." In similar fashion, the creation of a park along Rock Creek affording "charming drives and walks with constantly varying and beautiful scenery" would provide a powerful stimulus to real estate development and enhance the city's image as place to live and do business.³¹ Corcoran and his associates were unable to move Congress to revive the park legislation, but three years later the Senate passed a bill authorizing the Commissioners of the District of Columbia to make a survey for a park beginning at Massachusetts Avenue and extending along Rock Creek to the district line. The commissioners embraced the park concept and, after examining the situation, recommended the acquisition of a 919 acre tract beginning just south of Massachusetts Avenue at Lyons Mill. While the Senate suggested a width of 1,000', the commissioners advised that the park boundaries follow the local topography, encompassing the land within the creek valley but not extending arbitrarily beyond where the creek wound through rather narrow ravines in its southern reaches. "Where the banks are steep," it recommended, "only such acreage would be required as would suffice to control the crest and slopes and provide for the construction of suitable drives." The commissioners pointed out that the construction of such "needful drives" through the park would not only provide access to the parks varied scenery but have the additional effect of boosting the value of adjacent lands. The primacy of roadways in the commissioners' conception of the park was evident in the report's assertion that the proposed legislation would "secure to the capital a park and drive over 7 miles in length of unrivaled beauty." The commissioners' report also failed to move Congress to authorize the park, however.³²

By the late 1880s, the continued growth of Washington's northwest suburbs produced increasing concern that encroaching development would either despoil the park scenery or render

the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to May 1, 1907 (Washington, D.C.: Norman T. Eliot Printing Company, 1907), 5.

³¹ Letter from W. W. Corcoran, W. Strong, and Josiah Dent to D.C. Board of Commissioners, 17 November 1883, reproduced in Rock Creek Park: Information for the Public in Relation Thereto, 7-9.

³² Report, W. B. Webb, President, Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, to Hon. John J. Ingalls, Chairman, Committee for the District of Columbia, U.S. Senate, 24 June 1886; reproduced in Rock Creek Park: Information for the Public in Relation Thereto, 13-14.

the land too valuable to acquire and set aside for park purposes.³³ A series of bills and reports ensued. While almost everyone agreed the Rock Creek area should be set aside as a public park, many in Congress believed that funding should come from the District of Columbia and not from the federal treasury. This was part of a larger concern that Washington residents were enjoying elaborate civic improvements at the expense of federal taxpayers. The issue had attracted national attention during the 1870s when Alexander "Boss" Shepard's aggressive public improvement campaign bankrupted the District treasury and resulted in a federal bailout and the restoration of congressional oversight on District affairs. Congressmen who were not averse to channeling federal funding into their own jurisdictions attempted to demonstrate their fiscal responsibility by keeping a tight rein on funding in the federal city. Civic improvement projects were continually challenged with the assertion that Washingtonians should pay for their own parks and streets, just like the residents of any other city. Rock Creek Park supporters proclaimed that all Americans had an interest in ensuring that Washington was unsurpassed in beauty by any city in the world, insisting that an attractive park was an essential element of any modern city, much less a national capital. The second major criticism of the park proposal was that it was a thinly designed scheme to benefit real estate interests at the expense of federal taxpayers. This argument was bolstered by the presence of major local real estate operators among the project's most prominent advocates. The Washington Board of Trade, which was founded in 1889 largely for the purposes of encouraging growth by enhancing the city's attractiveness and was composed largely of local bankers, realtors, and others who stood to benefit from the project directly or indirectly, strongly supported the park legislation. Sen. John Sherman (R-OH), one of the park's most ardent congressional supporters, controlled extensive real estate holdings on both sides of the proposed reservation. The park's foremost champion, Charles C. Glover, was heavily involved in local banking, streetcar, and home insurance companies. While it is tempting to emphasize the potential for selfish motivations, Glover and many other park supporters firmly believed in the social value of park development. The support of such influential citizens was crucial to the success of the park proposal, moreover, and Washington park advocates were certainly not unique in mixing genuine interest in the civic benefits of park development with an eye toward personal profits of one sort or another. Park promoters throughout the country appealed to local elites and chambers of commerce to ensure the enactment of ambitious civic improvement schemes. In addition to reaping the benefits of increased land values, wealthier citizens were more likely to have the time and means to enjoy pleasure driving and other fruits of park development. This was particularly true in the case of suburban parks, which were often located so far from crowded urban districts as to be virtually inaccessible to poorer citizens. The location of Rock Creek Park was typically remote from the city's major population centers and surrounded by a growing array of elite residential

³³ Endorsing the 1887 version of the park legislation, the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia observed, "The rapidly increasing population of the District of Columbia, as well as the constantly increasing value of real estate, admonishes us that if this tract of country is to be reserved for park purposes the quicker it is done the better." (Report 31 January 1887, Committee on the District of Columbia [to accompany S. 2584] reproduced in Cox, "Park Improvement Papers No. 7," 109-10).

subdivisions.³⁴

Determined to secure passage of a park bill, Glover rallied his supporters by taking them on a Thanksgiving 1888 ride along Rock Creek. The local papers editorialized in favor of the project and various citizens groups expressed their support for the measure. Kansas Sen. John Ingalls, chairman of the Senate Committee of the District of Columbia, introduced a succession of park bills and Rep. John J. Hemphill of South Carolina submitted an effusive report endorsing the project. Hemphill extolled the area's natural beauties and warned that the proposed park lands were in imminent danger of development. He also brought up public health concerns in regard to the increasing pollution of the stream itself. Exemplifying the tendency to combine pragmatic and idealistic motivations, he noted that the park proposal was not just a matter of civic responsibility, but a wise investment "as a practical business measure." Dismissing criticisms that "the civilized world has been swept by a ruinous rage for parks," Hemphill pointed to successful examples of park development throughout the country and insisted "No city possessed of a rural park regrets its purchase." Preserving the natural scenery of Rock Creek and making the area accessible to the city's residents, Hemphill declared, would provide a park of unrivaled scenic beauty and "conduce greatly to the physical as well as the moral improvement of the people."³⁵

The Senate consistently ruled in favor of the project but the legislation continued to encounter resistance in the House, despite the endorsement of Hemphill's committee. A parallel movement was underway to authorize the development of a national zoo adjacent to Rock Creek in the picturesque terrain between Woodley and Klinge roads. Aided by its powerful connections, the Smithsonian Institution secured passage of the zoo bill in March 1889, but an amendment to include the broader park development measure was defeated. Senator Sherman introduced his version of the park bill on December 4, 1889. Earlier legislation had generally placed the park's southern border in the vicinity of Massachusetts Avenue, but Sherman's bill called for a park extending along either side of Rock Creek north of Klinge Road. The Senate

³⁴ Constance Green covers the Shepard administration's controversial improvement scheme in Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878, 336-90. The growth of the northwest suburbs and accusations of congressional profiteering in Washington real estate ventures are discussed in Constance Green's Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 14-22, 177-80. The tendency for park development to combine idealistic and economic motives was repeatedly acknowledged--and encouraged--by Olmsted and other nineteenth-century park planners and is discussed in retrospect in Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America, William Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). Rozensweig and Blackmar's The Park and the People considers this tendency in a harsher light. The legislative battles over the creation of Rock Creek Park are treated in considerable detail in Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study, 63-79, and Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 7-15.

³⁵ U.S. Congress, House Report No. 3866 (to accompany H.R. 12136), 50th Congress, 2d sess., 26 January 1889, reproduced in Cox, "Park Improvement Papers No. 7," 131-35.

approved the measure in January 1899, but the House again hesitated, even though the bill stipulated that half the costs of the project would come from District funds. House supporters tried to capitalize on the enthusiasm for the upcoming celebration of the quadricentennial of Columbus's landing in the New World by designating it "Columbus Memorial Park," but the same financial concerns and aspersions of real estate speculation continued to stall the legislation. The House again rejected the bill at the end of April. Additional pressure finally produced a favorable vote when the measure was reconsidered on May 26. A conference committee restored the name "Rock Creek Park" and made several additional amendments. The final version attempted to mediate potential accusations of speculative improprieties by establishing strict regulations for land acquisition, providing that adjacent landowners be assessed for the added value the park would accrue to their holdings, and creating a prestigious commission to designate the park boundaries and oversee the acquisition process. The Klinge Ford Bridge was designated as the southern limit of the park, which was to extend north along the creek and comprise a tract of no more than 2,000 acres. Between Klinge Ford and the Broad Branch and Blagden Mill roads, the width of the park was to be not less than 600' or more than 1200'. This restriction stemmed, no doubt, from a desire to reduce land acquisition costs while protecting the investment of real estate interests that were busily developing the region flanking the creek valley nearest the city. From Broad Branch north, the commissioners were given greater freedom to determine the park boundaries. President Harrison signed the bill into law on September 27, 1890. Echoing the language of the acts establishing the Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Sequoia national parks, the Rock Creek Park bill stipulated that the reservation would be "perpetually dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States." Improvement and maintenance of the park was entrusted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the D.C. Board of Commissioners. Underscoring the desire to develop the recreational potential of the park, the legislation instructed these authorities to proceed "as soon as possible, to lay out and prepare roadways and bridle paths, to be used for driving and horseback riding respectively, and footways for pedestrians." The park's managers were also instructed to develop guidelines and regulations to ensure "the preservation from injury and spoilation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible."³⁶

Early Improvements to Rock Creek Park

The park commission quickly set about inspecting the region and selecting the park boundaries. The commission's account of its explorations underscored the limited means of access that existed when the park was established. In mid October 1890, the commissioners traveled by carriage down the Linnaean Hill Road from Mount Pleasant then followed Peirce Mill Road along and across the creek to the mill. From Peirce's Mill they drove up to the ruins of Blagden Mill, where they left the carriages and walked through the woods to a nearby

³⁶ Public No. 296, Statutes at Large, 1889-1891, 492-95, reproduced in Cox, "Park Improvement Papers No. 7," 134-137.

promontory, where they admired the views of the future park. The group returned to their carriages and backtracked to Broad Branch Road, which they followed to Daniel Road (now Oregon Avenue). Taking Daniel Road to the District Line, they examined the remains of Fort DeRussy and then cut across Military Road to Rock Creek. Since there was no road along the creek, they proceeded south on foot. Several days later, the commission returned to scout the east side of the valley, taking their carriages out Fourteenth Street and Brightwood Avenue, roaming about on foot again, then crossing Military Road and completing the long circuit via Broad Branch Road and Peirce Mill back into the city. After a final horseback excursion to examine some of the rougher ground in more detail, the commission was ready to set the park's boundaries in the area north of the confluence of Rock Creek and Broad Branch. The park's west boundary would be formed by Broad Branch Road and Daniel Road. Sixteenth Street was proposed as the park's east boundary. Below Broad Branch, the tight restrictions and more rugged terrain led the commission to set the park boundaries more or less at the edge of the ravine enclosing the creek. The subsequent land acquisition process was extremely contentious and most of the property was secured through condemnation procedures. Financial limitations forced the commission to redraw the eastern boundary of the park to omit several significant parcels totaling approximately 300 acres. These revisions produced the irregular boundary north of Brightwood and left a substantial portion of the northeast corner of the proposed reservation in private hands. When the commission transferred authority over the park to the Rock Creek Board of Control in December 1894, the reservation totaled 1,605.976 acres.³⁷

The Board of Control of Rock Creek Park consisted of representatives of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia and the chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The assistant to the chief of engineers served as secretary to the commission and was largely responsible for the development and oversight of the park. The first person to hold this position was Capt. Gustav J. Feiberger, who was succeeded by Capt. Lansing H. Beach in 1896.³⁸ The ability of Feiberger, Beach and their successors to make improvements to the park was severely hampered by the fact that Congress made no appropriations for that purpose until 1899 and provided only minimal allotments for many years thereafter. While the existing roads through the park remained in generally good condition, the slow pace of additional improvements soon

³⁷ The Rock Creek Park Commission consisted of Gen. Thomas Casey, Chief of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Lt. Col. Henry Robert, Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia; Smithsonian Institution Secretary Samuel P. Langley; local attorney Richard Ross Perry; and journalist and prominent local citizen Henry Van Ness Boynton, who had been an avid supporter of the park proposal. Capt. William T. Rossell, Assistant Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, soon replaced Robert as the commission's executive officer. The commission's explorations were recorded in Proceedings of the Rock Creek Park Commission, 1890-1898, Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Grounds of the National Capital, RG 42, Entry 238, National Archives. Additional information on the boundary delineation and land acquisition process from Cox, "Park Improvement Papers No. 7," 114-16 and Bushong, Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study, 73-79.

³⁸ Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 19.

elicited a chorus of complaints from local residents. The park's first two decades were marked by repeated assertions that the failure to provide sufficient access to the newly acquired reservation severely limited its ability to perform its congressionally mandated function as a "public park and pleasure ground." These complaints rose to a head in 1896 and again in 1909, spurring the park managers to initiate work to increase the park's road mileage on both occasions. In addition to angering park enthusiasts who wanted better access to the scenery along Rock Creek, the government's failure to improve the park's road system in a timely fashion deprived the district coffers of a considerable source of revenue. Since the valley remained in essentially the same condition it was when the park was created, neighboring landowners were able to avoid the mandated assessments on their property taxes by arguing that the unimproved reservation had negligible effect on the value of their land holdings. Assessing landowners for the beneficial impact of public improvements was always a contentious issue, especially when the affected parties were as politically well-connected as the major property owners surrounding Rock Creek Park. Sympathetic judges repeatedly sided with the landowners, and the commissioners abandoned the attempt to secure the additional assessments in 1898.³⁹

The first campaign to compel the government to expand the park's road network was spearheaded by the Brightwood Citizens' Association, whose influential members resided in the rapidly developing area on the east side of the park. At a widely reported October 9, 1896 meeting, the association adopted a resolution urging Congress and the District Commissioners to provide \$100,000 for the development of roads and paths in Rock Creek Park. Observing that six years had passed since Congress authorized the park, the group's president W. W. Cox inveighed, "Yet so far as I am aware, not a single dollar has been spent in making it accessible to the people for whose recreation it was purchased." The result of the unconscionable delay, Cox claimed, was that "the romantic valley of Rock Creek, only a few hundred feet west of us, with all its natural beauty, remains as wild and almost as unobserved as it did when prehistoric men made their stone axes in the quarries on its banks." Exemplifying the popular association between parks and pleasure driving, Cox declared, "If this magnificent natural park is to be what it is intended to be, it is now full time that roads and pathways be made to and through it." While Cox cast the construction of an ample network of paths and pleasure drives as essential to the public enjoyment of the park, he recognized the need to strike a balance between accessibility and landscape preservation. Great care should be exercised, he declared, to ensure that the park's roadways be constructed "in absolute harmony with all its wild surroundings." Cox attempted to ward off criticism that federal tax dollars should not be spent on parks that primarily benefitted Washingtonians in general and Brightwood residents in particular by asserting, "This is not a matter limited to this association nor to citizens of the District only, nor to the thousands of visitors to the nation's capital, but to every citizen of the United States, most of whom will

³⁹ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912 (Washington, D.C.: 1912), 6-7.

visit Washington some time in their lives.”⁴⁰

The association's petition, which was reproduced in the Washington Evening Star and sent to the D.C. Board of Commissioners and both congressional subcommittees on district affairs, called attention to the failure on the part of the park's managers to fulfill the enabling legislation's instructions to make the park available “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” In its present condition, the petition declared, the park was “inaccessible to those for whom it was created, for want of proper roads and entrances.” Excoriating the park's overseers for failing to improve the park in a timely fashion, association member Edward T. Bates declared, “Nature has been most lavish in furnishing the materials and this magnificent aggregation of natural attractions has been purchased and given a name; but yet today only by name is it known by ninety-nine one-hundredths of the citizens of Washington simply because the doors are closed, and it will necessitate the expenditure of a few thousand dollars to open them.” Pointing out that the European countries saw fit to expend public funds to embellish their capitals with parks and rural recreation grounds, Bates implored, “Why, then, should Washington, the capital city of God's most favored country, be unprovided for in this respect?” Along with demanding the construction of additional entrances and roadways, the Brightwood Citizens' Association recommended that the government acquire the deleted tracts along the line of Sixteenth Street in order to provide more opportunities for direct access from that major thoroughfare. Restoring the boundary originally proposed by the park commission would also have the desirable effect of maintaining the park's “beauty and symmetry.” The association's preoccupation with this concern suggests that the absence of a developed road network limited access to the point that even the park's closest neighbors still tended to view it as an abstract proposal rather than as a physical reality. The association's last major suggestion was for the federal government to acquire the valley of Piney Branch as an addition to Rock Creek Park. This would preserve an area “of great natural beauty” while further improving access to the park. The Washington Evening Star provided a detailed account of the meeting and editorialized in favor of the group's suggestions.⁴¹

Responding to the growing public frustration over the poor road access to the park, Captain Beach finally began making improvements to the park's road system in 1897. Since neither Congress nor the D.C. Board of Commissioners saw fit to appropriate money for this purpose, the initial improvement program was limited to upgrading existing roads and restoring some sections of old roads that had been partially abandoned. Large amounts of brush were also cut back from the roadsides to enhance the appearance of park's roadways. Lacking

⁴⁰ The association's petition and Cox's remarks were reported in “Rock Creek Park: Brightwood Citizens' Association Propose a Public Improvement,” Washington Evening Star 10 October 1896. Cox reproduced this article and provided additional details in his “Park Improvement Papers No. 7,” 116-118.

⁴¹ “Rock Creek Park: Brightwood Citizens' Association Propose a Public Improvement,” Washington Evening Star 10 October 1896; “Improve Rock Creek Park,” [editorial] Washington Evening Star 10 October 1896.

appropriations to hire a professional road construction crew, Beach was forced to rely on chain gangs provided by local correctional authorities. The undependable and unskilled nature of the work force, along with the lack of funds for basic construction materials, accounted for the modest improvements made in 1897 and 1898. In addition to the general cleanup of the park's roads and roadsides, the most substantial accomplishment of these two years was the reopening of the short roadway connecting Broad Branch Road and Daniel Road on the east side of the park. This trace had been constructed during the Civil War as part of the military road system leading to the forts that encircled the district, but it had been long abandoned and the steep grades along the route had resulted in severe gullying. The chain gang cleared and regraded the roadway, which was further improved by park forces in 1899 when Congress finally appropriated a small sum for road development in the park. In the meantime, the park road system received another modest but essentially free boost when the district engineers constructed a trunk sewer along the east side of Rock Creek below Piney Branch, leaving a narrow but serviceable gravel road in their wake.⁴²

The 1899 appropriation was the result of intensive lobbying by the Washington Board of Trade. The board sought to improve access to the park, both for the immediate benefit of local residents and to ensure that the city presented the best possible public image by "keeping abreast of the times in the way of public improvements." An extensive and attractive park system, the board observed, was essential if Washington was going to establish a reputation as a first-rate residential city and a national capital of world-wide renown. Following the lead of the Brightwood Citizens' Association--Cox was also a member of the Washington Board of Trade's Committee on Parks and Reservations--the board chastised Congress for its failure to provide adequate funds for better access to Rock Creek Park. At a January meeting, the Board of Trade adopted an updated version of Cox's resolution, repeating the accusation that the park was "inaccessible to those for whom it was created" and calling for an amendment to the district appropriation bill to provide funding for improvements to Rock Creek Park in accordance with the 1890 enabling legislation. The substance of the proposed amendment was that the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park should be allowed to use the unexpended balance of \$23,693.45 from the original land acquisition appropriation for improvements within the park. The Board of Trade was unanimous in its support for the measure. According to its own account, the association's members "made special effort to impress on members of Congress the necessity of taking favorable action on the suggested measure." While the leftover appropriation would only cover a minor portion of the contemplated improvements, the important thing was to demonstrate progress and convince Congress that money spent on the development of roads in Rock Creek Park was a wise investment. As an editorial in the Washington Evening Star pointed out, even a modest expansion of the existing road network would "enable members of Congress to inspect the park and so to legislate intelligently upon its needs." The Board of Trade's lobbying efforts

⁴² Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 10-11.

proved successful. Congress quickly approved the amendment and released the funds, enabling Captain Beach to initiate construction on the creekside drive that would eventually bear his name.⁴³

An Evening Star editorial applauding this action demonstrated the changing conception of the appropriate approach to the development of Rock Creek Park. While supporters of the initial movement to create the park in the 1860s envisioned it as an intensively developed landscape along the lines of Central Park and other mid-nineteenth-century pleasure grounds, by the end of the nineteenth century the emphasis had shifted toward maintaining most of the reservation in its natural condition and providing only such improvements as were necessary to render the existing scenery more accessible. Asserting that existing scenery afforded "a succession of picturesque views which can not be exceeded in this portion of the country," the newspaper maintained, "There is little or no need of artificial gardening in the midst of such a profusion of natural beauty." The most appropriate course of action, according to the Evening Star, was "to permit as many as possible of the natural features to remain without change, while furnishing access into and through the park at such places as the topography suggests." Under no circumstances should the existing scenery be sacrificed to transform the park into "a semi-artificial picnic ground or flower garden." The newspaper suggested that recognition of the need to devise a careful plan designed to combine preservation and access had mediated criticism of the slow pace of road development in the park. Now that improvements were finally under way, the paper looked forward eagerly to the results. "When properly opened to the public use and preserved from disfiguring construction or destruction," the editorial concluded, "this park will soon become renowned as one of the finest reservations attached to any city in the world."⁴⁴

The first order of business was to construct a creekside drive that would provide access to the park's most picturesque scenery. The existing public road between Peirce Mill and Blagden Mill was in fairly good shape, so Beach's forces focused on locating, grading, and macadamizing a roadway along Rock Creek from the Blagden Mill Road through to Military Road. Work on the project began in May and the road was opened to the public by December. This was the most rugged and constricted portion of the creek valley, which is why previous road builders seeking the easiest path through the area had not attempted to follow the course of the creek itself. Constructing a roadway that would be straight and level enough for enjoyable pleasure driving without excessively marring the surrounding scenery was a formidable task. While time has hidden most signs of construction so that modern drivers probably think the park road builders just happened to discover a fortuitous pathway alongside the creek, considerable heavy grading and occasional blasting were required to produce the desired effect of a gently winding and

⁴³ "Park Improvement Papers, No. 1: Action of the Board of Trade in Relation to the Park System of the District of Columbia, March 28, 1901," in Park Improvement Papers, ed. Charles Moore (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 7-10, henceforth cited as Board of Trade.

⁴⁴ "Editorial," Washington Evening Star, 28 June 1899, reproduced in Board of Trade, 9-10.

essentially level creekside drive. Constructing the original 30'-wide road bed necessitated extensive cutting and filling, with filled sections averaging approximately 10' deep and some of the more extreme cuts exceeding 30' in height where the creek had eroded deeply into the surrounding banks. Under Beach's supervision the construction crews took great care to limit unnecessary destruction of the scenic qualities of the surrounding landscape. Side slopes were gently rounded to resemble natural ground contours rather than left as raw, angular slopes as was common practice in general highway construction. Excavated material was reused as fill whenever possible and not simply pushed to the side in ugly piles. When additional fill was needed, it was hauled from a distance rather than simply dug from nearby banks in order to avoid the unsightly borrow pits that marred the sides of most contemporary highways. Beach solved the problem of disposing of the large quantities of rock blasted out of the creek side ledges by bringing in a portable stone crusher to transform the unsightly debris into useful paving material. The Board of Trade's Committee on Park and Reservations was impressed by this maneuver, observing "this road is unique in thus supplying material for its own construction." Beach also received accolades for utilizing the abandoned canal leading to the old Blagden Mill as part of the road bed for the drive, avoiding unnecessary excavations while covering up an unwanted technological intrusion upon the park's naturalistic scenery.⁴⁵ The completed driveway--7,000'-long, with gently winding curves and an almost undetectable rise of 60' over the distance between Blagden Mill Road and Military Road--was widely praised as an engineering feat, as an artistic accomplishment, and as a long-awaited response to the need for enhanced access to Rock Creek Park. Asserting that the lack of a road through the heart of the valley had meant that park was "of slight public utility," local historian Louis P. Shoemaker rejoiced that the creekside drive "opens this beautiful tract for travel, and the public is afforded, for the first time, access to the interior of Rock Creek Park, and consequently an opportunity to enjoy its admirable natural resources."⁴⁶

When combined with existing roads, the new driveway finally provided Washingtonians with the essential element of the classic landscape park: a winding, well-paved circuit that afforded pleasure-drivers an exhilarating sense of smoothly flowing, uninterrupted movement while supplying a constantly changing display of picturesque scenery. The completion of Rock Creek Drive, as it was originally called, not only exposed the beauties of the creek to popular view, it eliminated the need for backtracking or breaking the trip into east and west portions combining park roads and ordinary city streets. W. V. Cox enthusiastically embraced this circuit as the ideal means of experiencing Rock Creek Park. "To see the beauties of Rock Creek Park and realize their manifold character in hill and valley, vista and dell, and at the same time be assured of first-class road surface for any kind of vehicle," Cox advised, "one is advised to make

⁴⁵ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 10-11; Cox, 120-22; Board of Trade, 8-9.

⁴⁶ Shoemaker, "Historic Rock Creek," 42.

his way by the Rock Creek Drive to the Military road, up that road westward to the Broad Branch road, and back over the latter, a most entrancing journey to the starting point."⁴⁷ Cox waxed rapturously about the attractions of the creekside drive, pronouncing it "a triumph engineering and landscape architecture" and urging anyone whose "mind and muscle can be inspired by the beautiful, [to] keep right on and follow the smooth macadam" as it wound beside the picturesque stream bed. Comparing the just-completed roadway with Philadelphia's renowned Wissahickon Drive, Cox asserted, "The most loyal Quaker in the brotherly city would hesitate to mention Wissahickon after rolling along this new and glorious drive through the national city's new park."⁴⁸ The Board of Trade also applauded the road's completion, declaring, "We can not commend too highly the work done by the officers in charge in constructing along the narrow gorges and between hills covered with the most beautiful trees a driveway which will be enjoyed by pleasure seekers in carriages, on horse, and on wheel, as well as by pedestrians." Many of the Board of Trade's members lived in Washington's prosperous northwest suburbs, which may account for the prescient observation that the road along Rock Creek was destined to serve as an express route for commuters seeking to avoid the congestion of city streets. Praising the still uncompleted driveway in November 1899, when there were only a handful of automobiles in the entire country, the report of the Committee on Parks and Reservations predicted the roadway would be of immense value to "citizens of the northern end of the District who may desire to avoid streets and roads occupied by electric cars in going to and coming from the city."⁴⁹

The construction of Rock Creek Drive between Blagden Mill and Military Road consumed approximately \$15,000 of the initial \$24,000 road-building appropriation. Beach managed to stretch the remaining funds over a variety of projects throughout the park. The final grading and macadamizing of the restored connection between Broad Branch and Daniel roads cost \$4,000. Approximately \$2,500 was spent improving the section between Klinge Road and Peirce Mill, filling in the gaps between existing road segments and upgrading the haphazard accumulation of roadways to the standard set by the new creekside drive. A small arched rustic stone bridge was built to carry the improved roadway over Piney Branch at a cost of \$600. The completion of this work afforded the possibility of a continuous drive along the creek all the way from Klinge Road at the park's south boundary to Military Road. Ridge Road, the second major roadway through the heart of the park, was laid out in 1899. Leaving the main creekside drive just north of Broad Branch, Ridge Road followed the height of land between the valleys formed by Rock Creek and Broad Branch, winding through a mixture of fields and woods to the intersection of Daniel and Military roads. Beach enlisted the chain gang again to conduct

⁴⁷ Cox, 122.

⁴⁸ Cox, 121.

⁴⁹ Board of Trade, 9.

preliminary clearing and grading for this project. Grading was also begun in 1899 on an extension of the creekside drive from Military Road north to the District Line. The section of the Linnaean Hill or Peirce Mill Road between Mount Pleasant and Rock Creek was rerouted during 1899. The new alignment wound gradually down the slope to the north of the old road. It was immediately heralded as a marked improvement over its steeply pitched, "difficult and dangerous" predecessor. A spindly 300' steel truss and girder bridge carried the relocated roadway over Piney Branch. Since Peirce Mill Road was a major public thoroughfare and the valley of Piney Branch had not yet been added to Rock Creek Park, most of this work was performed by the District of Columbia. Grading and macadamizing the short segment between the park boundary and Rock Creek consumed \$1,000 of park improvement funds. Another windfall of sorts for Rock Creek Park users was the donation by park neighbor Thomas Bladgen of a roadway along the east side of the park providing access from the newly opened Sixteenth Street extension. Bladgen Avenue, as it was called, followed a small stream valley leading from the Brightwood area down into the park, fording Rock Creek to meet the main driveway near the ruins of Bladgen Mill. The gently graded 120'-wide roadway was praised as a great improvement over the "old and dangerous" Bladgen Mill Road, which was subsequently abandoned. The extension of Sixteenth Street parallel to the park was also touted as a means of improving access Rock Creek.⁵⁰

Despite the enthusiastic response to this initial flurry of road work, Congress and the D.C. Board of Commissioners reduced the amount of funding available for the next year's improvements to \$15,000, half the amount requested by Beach. The Board of Trade protested this meager allotment, proclaiming, "It is to be regretted that Congress has failed to make better provision for the improvement of this beautiful park to put it in a condition to be enjoyed by the public." Beach's forces used the limited appropriation to finish grading the dirt road along the creek from Military Road to the north end of the park. They also finished grading Ridge Road and began to widen and improve the older section of Rock Creek Drive between Klinge Road and Bladgen Mill Road. The slow pace of improvements prompted another editorial in the Evening Star. Condemning Congress's failure to provide funds to ensure adequate access to the park, the newspaper lamented, "Few people in Washington are yet acquainted with this royal principality of the picturesque so near their very thresholds." The government's reluctance to carry through on its commitment to develop roadways resulted in a continuation of the unfortunate state of affairs in which "There is a vague understanding that a considerable amount of unimproved property lying on either side of Rock Creek . . . has been improved for park purposes, but few in comparison to the population have anything more definite about it in their minds." If only Congress would live up to the terms of the original legislation, the Evening Star proclaimed, Rock Creek Park would soon become world famous for the unmatched splendor and

⁵⁰ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 10-11; Cox, 121; Board of Trade, 8, 14-15; District of Columbia Department of Highways, Washington's Bridges: Historic and Modern (Washington, D.C.: Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1948), 56.

extent of its picturesque scenery. Already, the newspaper insisted, the park's natural attractions were "a hundred times much superior to the much-vaunted parallelogram on Manhattan Island." Beach asked Congress for \$50,000 for improvements for the following year, a sum that the Board of Trade and the local papers endorsed as essential, not only to increase the public's enjoyment of Rock Creek Park but to improve Washington's image as a city of international stature. While park advocates continually chastised Congress for failing to provide adequate support for road improvements, they expressed nothing but admiration for the ability of Captain Beach and his associates to make significant headway with such limited funds. A September 1, 1900 editorial in the Evening Star lauded Beach as the "guardian angel of Rock Creek Park" and praised assistant engineer W. B. Richards as "his effective vicar in the good work." Cox applauded Beach, Richards, and Rock Creek Board of Control member Gen. John M. Wilson of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for their skill and resourcefulness "in accomplishing so much for the improvement of Rock Creek Park with the small funds available." The Board of Trade similarly commended the three men for their accomplishments in "opening up roads and developing the park on lines of great beauty." Beach, by all accounts, was the leading figure in this work. In recognition of his efforts, the Board of Control officially named the creekside road "Beach Driveway" on November 20, 1901.⁵¹

Such endorsements helped secure a more substantial appropriation for fiscal year 1902. Congress balked at supplying the full \$50,000 request, but the \$37,500 it made available enabled the park forces to undertake a number of substantial projects. Ridge Road was widened and surfaced with a mixture of macadam and trap rock. The popularity of the creekside drive necessitated the application of an additional layer of macadam during the summer and fall. Widening and regrading the old road between Klinge Road and Peirce Mill from 15' to 30' through the narrowest portion of the creek valley necessitated some heavy excavation and blasting through approximately 200' of solid rock. Additional improvements were also made to the section between Peirce Mill and Blagden Mill. Since this was officially an old county road, this part of the work was accomplished with non-park funds. The opening of Blagden Avenue up to the park boundary and the abandonment of the old Blagden Mill Road within the park made it necessary to construct an 800' roadway to connect Blagden Avenue with Beach Drive. A temporary bridge was constructed to carry the new roadway across Rock Creek. Two permanent bridges were constructed in 1902. Pebble Dash Bridge carried Beach Drive across Broad Branch near its junction with Rock Creek. Designed by noted architect Glenn Brown, Pebble Dash Bridge was a short span melan arch concrete bridge faced with a sandy colored brushed concrete finish. The rough texture simulated a coarse, pebbled, rustic construction material. The "dash" designation stemmed from a regular row of small protuberances set a few inches below the top of the gracefully arched parapet. Additional ornamentation was supplied by a row of rectangular

⁵¹ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 9-11; Board of Trade, 8-11; Cox, 119-122; "Editorial," Washington Evening Star, reproduced in Cox, 13.

stones or bricks tracing a parallel arc at the level of the road surface. English ivy was planted at each corner of the bridge to further the goal of blending the structure with its park surroundings. The other new bridge carried Beach Drive across Rock Creek at the site of the old Argyle/Bladgen Mill dam. Another melan arch concrete structure, Boulder Bridge was even more self-consciously rustic. The concrete structure was completely concealed within a facing of large, random-laid field stones. The stones were gathered from outside the park, but their size and irregular shapes were intended to harmonize with the rocky stream bed. While many of the stones were cut to facilitate their transportation and placement, no worked surfaces were exposed and the joints were very tight and deeply raked to conceal the interconnecting concrete. The Rock Creek Board of Control gave Beach credit for the design, though he was probably influenced by preliminary drawings prepared by Glenn Brown. The actual working drawings were prepared by D.C. bridge engineer William J. Douglas. Brown had designed several rustic bridges and a culvert for the National Zoo. He had issued a paper the previous year in which he advised that all structures within the two parks be constructed to "appear as natural outcroppings of nature." Brown was able to achieve this effect to some degree with his short-span National Zoo structures, which convincingly conveyed the illusion of being random accidents of nature. The almost cartoonish rusticity of Boulder Bridge and the since-destroyed Zoological Park log bridge bespoke a fondness for excessively picturesque effect that would soon lose favor among professional park and bridge designers. Brown's broader comments about the appropriate course of development of Rock Creek Park would have more lasting effect. Chief among Brown's suggestions was the general principle that "the opening of paths, roads, and vistas, so designed and arranged as to display and enhance its natural beauties, is the only treatment that should be allowed" and his insistence that "all artificial work should conform to and harmonize with nature."⁵²

The prestigious 1901 Senate Park Commission also weighed in with some general suggestions about the development of Rock Creek Park. The commission expressed considerable ambivalence about the construction of Beach Drive. While admitting that the roadway was, for the most part "very skillfully laid out," the report contended that there were several places where it had "very appreciably injured the scenery." The commission acknowledged that "the value of the park scenery depends absolutely on making it conveniently accessible to the people," but cautioned "nothing can be gained if the means of access destroys the scenery which it was meant to exhibit." The commission's biggest concern was that the popularity of Beach Drive would soon create pressure to widen the narrow roadway to accommodate the growing crowds that flocked to the park to view the creekside scenery. Given that squeezing the existing roadway into the creek bottom had already compromised the natural

⁵² Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 12; Bushong, 108; Meyer, 77; Glenn Brown, "A Suggestion for Grouping Government Buildings; Landscape, Monuments, and Statuary," in Papers Relating to the Improvement of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, ed. Glenn Brown, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 68-69.

beauties of the park's most precious scenery, widening the roadbed to even a modest degree would create "a calamity." Reconstructing Beach Drive to accommodate future traffic demands, the report warned, "would injure the character of the valley irremediably." The commission advised that the best way to accommodate the demand for increased access without further damaging the scenery along Rock Creek was to relieve pressure on Beach Drive by constructing additional driveways through less sensitive portions of the park. The ideal place for such alternative circuits, the commission suggested, was to locate them "high enough on the valley sides to leave the wild sylvan character of the stream at the bottom of the gorge uninjured, but yet within sight and sound of the water." Building one or more new roadways along the sides of the valley would cost more than widening Beach Drive and require substantial grading along with the destruction of many attractive trees and forest scenery, but these losses were vastly preferable to additional construction along the creek itself. Neither course of action was ideal, but the commission presented multiple driveways as the lesser of two evils. The loss of additional creekside scenery, the report declared "would be a pound of flesh from nearest to the heart, while the former would compare with the amputation of a leg."⁵³

The commission's other main concern was that improvements within the park were being produced in piecemeal fashion with no evidence of a comprehensive development plan. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who wrote the landscape architecture portions of the Senate Park Commission's report, was a firm believer in the value of comprehensive management plans based on detailed studies of a park's natural features and intended uses. Olmsted was strongly influenced by his father's work and by the pioneering comprehensive landscape development reports prepared by Charles Eliot for the Boston Metropolitan Park Commission. Recommending that a similar approach be taken in Rock Creek Park, the Senate Park Commission report stated, "After the completion at its present width of the road along the creek, we would advise most urgently that no further work of development be attempted until careful studies have been made for the comprehensive treatment of the whole park." Among the issues that needed to be addressed were the construction of roads and visitor facilities, the development of vistas through selective cutting, the planting of vegetation to conceal undesirable views, and

⁵³ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, Report of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia on the Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 88-89, 170-71. The Senate Park Commission report is second only to L'Enfant's original plan in terms of shaping the physical development of Washington, D.C. It was also extremely influential in the development of modern American city planning. The genesis of the commission's report and the impact of its proposals is discussed in Charles Moore, Washington Past and Present (New York: The Century Company, 1929); John Reys, Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); William H. Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Richard Longstreth, ed., The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991, Studies in the History of Art 30, Symposium Papers 14 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991); Jon A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," Journal of Urban History 2 (August 1976), 417-28; and Jon A. Peterson "The Nation's First Comprehensive City Plan: A Political Analysis of the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C., 1900-1902," American Planning Association Journal 51 (April 1985): 134-50.

general forest management issues. The park contained a varied mixture of attractive large trees and less attractive second growth, along with a large amount of unsightly dead timber, much of which stemmed from the chestnut blight that was devastating eastern forests. The park commission also recommended a number of additions to protect key aspects of the park and provide connections with other elements of the city's park system. Key among the proposed acquisitions were the valley of Piney Branch and the valley of Rock Creek between the zoo and the Potomac waterfront, which was cast as essential components of the commission's grand scheme for the development of Washington. The Senate Park Commission's report would play a key role in the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway but it had little immediate impact on the park itself. Despite the commission's insistence that improvements within the park be postponed until further study, the Board of Control continued to proceed with piecemeal construction projects until 1917, when the Olmsted Brothers firm was finally hired to produce a comprehensive management plan.⁵⁴

The main constraint on the development of roads in Rock Creek Park continued to be Congress's parsimonious attitude toward funding improvements to the Washington park system. The Board of Control received only \$2,500 for road improvements in fiscal year 1903. This paltry amount barely covered basic maintenance and repairs to Beach Drive occasioned by a winter flood that washed out several sections of roadway and damaged the temporary bridges on the unimproved portion of Beach Drive north of Military Road. The biggest project undertaken in 1903 was the grading of a 3,000' section of Ross Drive. This new roadway connected Ridge Road and Military Road and ran more or less parallel to Beach Drive a short distance back from the west edge of the narrow gorge formed by Rock Creek. By providing an alternate route designed to lessen pressure on Beach Drive and extending along the edge of the valley far enough back to avoid infringing on the creekside scenery but close enough to partake of the rugged character of surrounding landscape, Ross Drive embodied the suggestions of the Senate Park Commission, though there is no evidence that the commission's report was directly responsible for its development or location. The designation "Ross Drive" honored John W. Ross, who served as president of both the D.C. Board of Commissioners and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park. Ross died in July 1902, just as construction on the road had begun. Since Congress was unwilling to provide the necessary funds, Beach was once again forced to rely on the chain gang. A team was hired for hauling and heavy grading, but prisoners performed most of the work on Ross Road. Approximately 3,000' of the 8,000' roadway was graded. Constructing the roadway through the rugged terrain on the west slope of Rock Creek valley was a demanding task requiring heavy cuts and fills and the erection of a substantial wood viaduct to carry the road across a deep ravine located approximately midway between Ridge Road and Military Road. This impressive rustic structure was 170' long and 45' high at its center. The flooring was supported by ten strongly braced log trestles and two substantial log

⁵⁴ Report of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia on the Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia, on Rock Creek Park: 88-89, 170-71; on Rock Creek Parkway: 85-86, 137-42.

abutments. The Board of Control was proud of this bridge as an impressive accomplishment for financially strapped engineers working with conscripted labor, but it was soon replaced by a more permanent concrete structure.⁵⁵

The next year's appropriation of \$12,000 enabled park forces to undertake a variety of tasks. The grading of Ross Drive was completed and the lower end of Blagden Avenue was extended along the east side of Rock Creek to Peirce Mill Bridge. Park officials originally considered building a bridge across Rock Creek just below Broad Branch to provide a more direct connection between Blagden Avenue and Broad Branch Road, but this course was rejected as too expensive and injurious to the attractive scenery at the junction of Rock Creek and Broad Branch. A simple ford served as a popular fair weather crossing at this point until the 1950s, when both the ford and the 1902 Pebble Dash Bridge were replaced by modern concrete bridges that obscure the confluence of the two streams and significantly impair the picturesque qualities of this area. Milkhouse Ford, the sole remaining ford in the park, was given a paved bottom in 1904. This crossing was already valued for its historic quality as a remnant of one of the earliest roads through the area. Its improvement was considered vital due to the rough quality of the stream bed and the ford's status as the only practical crossing between Military Road and the north end of the park. Park forces replaced the rocky and eroded creek bottom with a 6"-8" thick concrete pavement 24'-wide and 74'-long, with approaches of granite block. The other big project for 1904 was the reconstruction of the dam at Peirce Mill. The old wood dam had washed out, causing considerable damage along the banks of the creek. Since the mill was no longer in use the dam had little practical value, but both the dam and the mill pond were highly valued as picturesque additions to the park's predominantly natural scenery. The new dam was constructed of concrete but faced on the top and downstream side with irregular boulders in keeping with the rustic treatment of park structures at this time. Rebuilding the dam cost \$4,000. Grading Ross Drive and Blagden Avenue cost \$800 and \$2,000 respectively. Paving Milk House Ford cost \$500. The remainder of the year's appropriation was spent on routine maintenance and road resurfacing, the stabilization of creek banks with stone, and the improvement of pedestrian paths.⁵⁶

No major construction projects were undertaken during the next two years. The yearly appropriation of \$15,000 was spent primarily on improving existing roadways. Blagden Avenue was regraded and macadamized to the park border, portions of Beach Drive were resurfaced, and the section of Beach Drive north of Military Road was graded but not macadamized. The ford across Rock Creek below the mouth of Broad Branch was also improved. Water pipe lines were extended along several of the major roadways to aid in sprinkling the surfaces to control the dust

⁵⁵ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 13.

⁵⁶ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 14.

problem created by increasing traffic. A concerted effort was made to clear out unsightly scrub pine that had begun to invade old fields and clearings. Considerable work was also performed on the park's bridle and pedestrian paths.⁵⁷

The biggest news for 1907 was the long-awaited acquisition of a tract of land along Piney Branch to preserve the stream valley and provide another eastern access to Rock Creek Park. The addition, which averaged approximately 400'-wide, was initially designated "Biddle Parkway" in honor of Col. John Biddle, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Biddle served as Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia and Secretary of the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park in 1907 and lobbied strenuously for the acquisition of Piney Branch. The main construction project for 1907 was the replacement of the log and timber trestle on Ross Drive with an open spandrel, reinforced concrete, tripled-hinged arch designed by D.C. bridge engineer William J. Douglas. The new Ross Drive span was 168' long and 45' high at the center, with an 18'-wide deck. Concrete troughs at each corner of the railings served as planters for vines that were intended to harmonize the structure with its wooded surroundings. The simple unadorned form of the new bridge represented a distinct departure from previous attempts by park engineers to conceal modern materials and construction techniques with rustic ornamentation. While engineers applauded the light, skeletal construction as a way to minimize the bridge's visual impact on the surrounding environment, the decision to employ this strikingly modern design was probably motivated at least as much by economic factors as by aesthetic concerns. The three-hinge arch form was garnering praise in engineering publications as a light and graceful means of spanning moderate distances that was significantly cheaper than traditional filled-spandrel masonry-clad construction. Opting for the rustic or beaux art treatments given to most park bridges at this time would have added considerably to the structure's cost at a time when Rock Creek Park was still suffering from low appropriations. Any elaborate formal treatment would have been lost on most park visitors, since the arch spanned a deep, wooded ravine, where only equestrians and walkers would observe its frankly modern construction. Had the structure been more prominently located, it seems probable that construction would have been delayed until a more traditional design were possible. For many years thereafter, more visible spans such as the Sixteenth Street Bridge over Piney Branch and the monumental bridges over Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were provided with more traditional massing and surface treatment. As late as 1935, a newspaper article on Rock Creek Park's bridges asserted that, though the three-hinge art design had numerous engineering advantages, it was best used in out-of-the-way locations due to the difficulty of devising an attractive architectural treatment. Construction on Ross Drive Bridge continued into 1908.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 14-15.

⁵⁸ "Ever Try Bridge Hunting in Rock Creek?" Washington Evening Star, 20 October 1935; Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 9, 15-17; Bushong, 109.

The following year, heavy flooding destroyed a simple wood bridge that had spanned a small tributary of Rock Creek on the north part of Beach Drive, just below the park's uppermost ford. The floodwaters also washed out a considerable length of roadway. To repair the damage and avoid further recurrences, a 1,000' section of Beach Drive was relocated to higher ground and a concrete culvert was built to replace the old bridge. Two minor bridges were built along the upper portion of Beach Drive in 1910-11, along with a small bridge or culvert on the new park entrance under construction from the intersection of Sixteenth and Kennedy streets to Beach Drive. All these structures were sturdy masonry constructions of simple rustic design faced with native gray stone. The new roadway leading into the park from Kennedy Street was completed in 1912. It was designated "Morrow Drive" in honor of Maj. Jay J. Morrow, Corps of Engineers, who served as Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia and Secretary of the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park. Morrow Drive was completed in 1912. The park then turned its attention toward widening and improving Beach Drive between Military Road and the district line and considering others means of accommodating the increasingly heavy pleasure traffic without adversely affecting the park's scenery.⁵⁹

The new roads and related improvements had the desired effect of encouraging greater public use of Rock Creek Park. As was usually the case with park road development, the improved access was a mixed blessing. More people than ever were using the park, but the increased patronage produced heavy wear and tear on the park roadways. The growing number of visitors--and the rapid rise in automobile traffic in particular--began to make the existing road network appear inadequate and even dangerous. Despite the opening of new roadways and improvements to existing drives, park officials were forced to deal with complaints about crowded conditions, conflicts between motorists and other users, and the problem of upgrading narrow, unpaved roads that were poorly suited to automobile traffic. The first official counts of vehicular traffic within the park were taken in 1907. An average of 3,255 vehicles used the lower portion of Beach Drive on consecutive Sundays in June, along with an unrecorded number of pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists. These initial traffic counts made no distinction between automobiles and horse-drawn vehicles, perhaps because automobiles remained such a rarity in these pre-"Model T" years. Nevertheless, the increase in traffic was enough to prompt L. R. Grabill, the assistant engineer in charge of Rock Creek Park at the time, to recommend construction of a separate path system for pedestrians on the grounds that, "The roads and bridle paths are so crowded with vehicles on Sundays that walking is attended with danger and discomfort." For the most part, however, the Board of Control maintained that the existing road system would suffice for the foreseeable future. Asserting that "The beauty of this park lies in its closeness to nature--in its lack of artificialness," the board's 1907 report declared the current improvements sufficient and advised, "to open roads before they are needed, and to unduly improve the park, would take away from its beauty without gain." Automobiles were prohibited

⁵⁹ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 9, 17-23; Bushong, 109.

from dirt roads such as Ross Drive and the section of Beach Drive north of Military Road, but the Board of Control did not yet consider it necessary to attempt to spread motor traffic more evenly through the park by macadamizing these unimproved sections. The board acknowledged these roadways would have to be paved eventually, but recommended such action be delayed as long as possible to preserve the rustic appearance of the park and reserve the enjoyment of more secluded driveways for horse-drawn vehicles only. While it recognized this luxury would not last forever and that the upper part of Beach Drive, in particular, would have to be paved before long, and probably widened as well, the board strongly opposed widening the main section of Beach Drive between Peirce Mill and Military Road. Any attempt to do so, the board warned, "would seriously injure the appearance of the park." The board maintained that the most desirable course of action was a conservative policy of maintenance and incremental improvement. The board summarized these concerns in its 1907 report, which provided the first official statement of road building policy for Rock Creek Park. As submitted by Major Biddle, the basic philosophy was "to build roads only as they are needed; macadamize roads only as their use requires; make all roads the best of their kind; keep them without suspicion of dust."⁶⁰

The rapid growth in park attendance during the next few years forced the Board of Control to re-evaluate this optimistic assessment of the park's road system. A survey of the traffic passing by Peirce Mill on April 10, 1910 counted close to 3,000 vehicles, along with 1215 pedestrians, 293 equestrians, and 190 bicyclists.⁶¹ Park forces estimated the total number of visitors for the day exceeded 10,000. Horse-drawn vehicles still outnumbered motor vehicles by a count of 1,400 to 1,169, but park officials recognized that existing park roadways could not meet the increasing demands of park users, particularly the strain on park resources created by the growing presence of automobiles. Rock Creek Park was not unique in this respect. Similar pressures were affecting parks throughout the country. The number of automobiles registered in the United States rose from 8,000 in 1900 to 458,000 in 1910. This transformation would be even more dramatic over the next two decades, as the motor car evolved from an exotic luxury into a ubiquitous facet of American life. The number of registered vehicles topped 8 million in

⁶⁰ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to May 1, 1907 (Washington, D.C.: Norman T. Eliot Printing Company, 1907), 30; Grabill quote and statistics in L. R. Grabill, "Report of Operations in Rock Creek Park during the fiscal year ending, June 30, 1907"; prohibition on automobiles on Ross and upper Beach drives declared in letter, Morrow to Grabill, 9 May 1907, both in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

⁶¹ Rock Creek Park statistics for 1910 are from Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

1920 and rose to nearly 23 million in 1930.⁶²

Even before this tremendous explosion of automobile ownership, however, the automobile was establishing itself as a significant presence in America's parks and parkways. While only five years before, the Board of Control had deemed Rock Creek Park's road system sufficient for current and future needs, the board's 1912 report asserted that the rapid increase in automobile traffic necessitated a two-fold policy of improving existing roads and opening new ones. "By this means," the report advised, "an increase in the number of circuits followed by automobiles will be furnished, and the danger of accidents due to congestion on the existing roads decreased." The first order of business was to widen and macadamize the park's remaining dirt roads, beginning with the north section of Beach Drive between Military Road and the District Line. The board also proposed to macadamize Daniel Road along the west side of the park and do the same to the road leading from the north end of Beach Drive east to Georgia Avenue. The rapid completion of Morrow Drive was a further reflection of the pressure to increase the park's road mileage, providing a popular new entrance from the east side of the park. Park engineers also began to consider the best locations for the construction of additional roads to spread traffic more evenly through the park. Despite this campaign to upgrade the park's road system for motor traffic, the Board of Control reaffirmed its commitment to the basic principle that "The beauty of the Park lies in its closeness to nature, and only such roads, bridle paths, and foot paths should be opened as are necessary to take care of traffic."⁶³

Another response to the increase in automobile traffic was the decision to begin oiling the existing macadam roads. Park maintenance forces discovered that the traditional method of watering macadam road surfaces to keep down dust and bond the pavement together was no match for the erosive force of automobile tires. Heavy applications of oil were applied to Beach Drive and Ridge Road in 1911 and 1912. These treatments helped subdue the dust problem, but won little favor with carriage drivers and equestrians, who objected that the oil made park roads dangerously slippery for steel-shod horses. Park management had definitely determined that the automobile was the vehicle around which future road development and maintenance decisions would revolve, however. In an October 1911 letter explaining to a disgruntled horse fancier that "the rapidly moving automobile, destroys, within a year or to, any untreated macadam road," park overseer Lt. Col. W. V. Judson asserted, "Where the automobiles are, there oil has come to stay." Judson maintained that the failure of Parisian authorities to adopt this solution had destroyed the road system for twenty miles around the French capital. Another problem for park overseers was that, despite official prohibitions, motorists were inclined to explore the park's

⁶² Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 23-24. General automobile registration statistics are from John Rae, The Road and the Car in American Life (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 50.

⁶³ Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912, 23-24.

unpaved roads. A September 1913 letter complained that motorists exhibited "a mania" for attempting the park's minimally improved side roads, even in bad weather, leaving holes and ruts that made the roads impassable for other vehicles. Another letter to the Board of Control suggests that the park's 12 mph speed limit was minimally observed. Commenting on the danger posed by the many sharp and blind curves in the park, a Mrs. B. H. Lane complained, "the average car driver there loves to dash around these at the highest speed limit, and who is to say he does not oftener exceed it." In addition to setting a top speed of 12 mph, the regulations on automobile use in Rock Creek Park adopted in 1909 stipulated that all motor vehicles should have effective mufflers, that none be allowed to emit "any prolonged, dense or offensive quantities of smoke or disagreeable odors," and that all vehicles be shut off when they were not moving. Experience in other parks had determined that horses were more likely to be spooked by stationary vehicles than moving ones.⁶⁴

Another problem confronting park managers at this time was the issue of street car access to Rock Creek Park. The new roads enabled owners of automobiles and carriages to enjoy the park scenery, but this represented a small and privileged selection of the district's population. The relative inaccessibility of Rock Creek Park by public transportation prompted a chorus of complaints, many of which explicitly criticized the elitist nature of the park's existing improvements. It was true that anybody could explore the park on foot, but the upper northwest location was far removed from the city's main population centers. Prior to World War I, the area surrounding Rock Creek Park was sparsely settled. The neighborhoods that had developed were among the most exclusive in the city. Street car lines extended along Connecticut Avenue and approached the east side of the park at Mount Pleasant and Kennedy Street, but by the standards of the time, the distance between the trolley stops and the park was considered excessive, especially when added to the lengthy circuits within the park.

Street car lines had been constructed up to and even through major parks in many American cities in order to render them more accessible to the general public. Many Washingtonians felt there was no reason not to pursue a similar policy in regard to Rock Creek

⁶⁴ In an October 30, 1911 letter to the Rock Creek Park Board of Control, Arthur D. Addison complained that the park's macadam drives were so oily that he had to turn his horse off the paved roadway on the slightest hills. Silver Spring resident Alex Hunter reported that 58 automobiles used the direct road from upper Beach Road to the District Line on one Sunday in September 1913. (Letters from Addison (30 October 1911), Hunter (17 September 1913) and Lane (6 August 1909), along with official replies, are in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Letters Received by the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1891-1908; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 240, RG 42, National Archives. Traffic regulations are from Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives. The propensity for horses to be frightened by standing vehicles was noted in the Annual Report of the Park Guard for 1899, in Commissioners of Fairmount Park, Sixth Report of the Commissioners of Fairmount Park, December 31, 1899 (Philadelphia, 1899), 94.

Park. Prompted by a series of articles in the Washington Herald in the fall of 1909, a number of citizens wrote the Board of Control to complain that the park was virtually inaccessible to the majority of Washingtonians in hopes of pressuring the board and the D.C. Commissioners to take action to promote the construction of streetcar lines to and through the park. Declaring that Rock Creek Park was "among the most inaccessible public recreation places and parks in the world," a local German-American society, the Washington *Sangerbund*, accused the Board of Control of failing to carry out Congress's directive to make the park available as a pleasuring ground for the people of Washington.⁶⁵

This was the same argument the Board of Trade and the Brightwood Citizens' Association had used to prod the Board of Control into building carriageways in the park a decade earlier. This second round of criticism was based on the contention that such pleasure drives were of little use to most Washingtonians, especially the poorest residents, who were theoretically most in need of access to urban parks because they had no other means of escaping the city. Numerous letters and petitions questioned the board's priorities, asserting that the construction of carriage and automobile roads through the park benefitted the city's elite while doing virtually nothing to make the park accessible to the common people. Typical letters proclaimed, "This beautiful park can be enjoyed only by the few having their own conveniences," urging park and city officials to make the park more accessible to ordinary citizens "who are not in possession of carriages or automobiles." While many of these complaints came from residents of east and central Washington, letters from addresses closer to the park suggest that public displeasure with park improvement policy was motivated by social and economic class as well as by geography. A letter from John S. Cotton, of 1731 T Street, tackled the class issue head on. "In view of the fact that the wealthy people have their golf clubs, the Potomac Park for automobiling and other places easily accessible where they can get away from the city streets," he asserted in a letter urging park managers to make the park scenery more accessible via public transportation, "it would seem as though effort should be made to make these play grounds accessible to the common people." By 1911, even the well-heeled Brightwood Citizens' Association had come out in favor of extending street car lines into the park. The association's statements in support of a bill authorizing street railway construction in the park invoked the familiar argument that the park's management was failing to fulfill Congress's stipulation that Rock Creek Park be made accessible to all the citizens of the District of Columbia. More than twenty years after the park's creation, the association declared, it was still essentially inaccessible to 95 percent of the city's population. Striking a newly egalitarian tone, the association proclaimed, "Owing to the absence of street car service through said park, the plain people, their wives and children, are prevented from using said Park and enjoying the

⁶⁵ Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 241, RG 42, National Archives.

beauties therein for health and pleasure which by right they should have.”⁶⁶ Park officials responded to these complaints in several ways. Assistant Engineer L. R. Grabill insisted that the park was perfectly accessible by street car and insinuated that the public was to blame for its apparent ignorance of the various trolley stops within walking distance of the park. Grabill conducted a survey to establish the exact distance between park entrances and the nearest street car facilities. His December 1911 memorandum on the subject asserted that the park was readily accessible by street car, though the nearest stops seem to have been at least half a mile from the park boundaries and a mile or more from the creek itself.⁶⁷

The Board of Control's published 1912 report was more solicitous toward the non-motoring public, acknowledging that the issue of street car access was an important concern and admitting that the nearest existing stops were “a considerable walk” from the interior of the park. The board expressed a commitment to studying various means of extending trolley service into the park. In the meantime, the Board of Control consulted with park officials in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia and decided that the best temporary measure was to allow a private tour company to run a fleet of twelve passenger sightseeing vehicles on carefully prescribed routes through the park. The gasoline-powered cars left the corner of Eighteenth Street and Columbia Road every hour on the hour, drove through the National Zoo and ran along Beach Drive to Military Road, returning along the same route. Riders could traverse the park without dismounting for fifteen cents or pay a ten cent fare for a one-way ticket into or out of the park. This service proved to be highly popular, though some park users criticized the ungainly vehicles as dangerous and unsightly. One correspondent suggested they be replaced with horse-drawn stages.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Letters and petitions, most dating from September-November 1909, can be found in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 241, RG 42, National Archives.

⁶⁷ Memo, Grabill to Garges, Chief Clerk, Engineering Division, 13 December 1911, Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

⁶⁸ Summary of public transit issue in Report of the Secretary, Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia, Operations from the Establishment of the Park September 27th, 1890 to June 30, 1912; copies of Board of Control Secretary W. V. Judson to park officials in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia; and letter, from Mrs. B. H. Lane, 6 Aug 1909, suggesting horse stages in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 241, RG 42, National Archives; additional information on park motor stage in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Proceedings of the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, 1894-1917; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 239, RG 42, National Archives.

The desire to improve access to Rock Creek Park contributed to renewed efforts to acquire the lower valley of Rock Creek and transform it into a parkway linking the Mall and the Potomac parks with Rock Creek Park and the National Zoo. This idea had been around since Michler submitted his report in 1867. The Washington Board of Trade embraced the concept and board member Henry B. Looker outlined a basic proposal for improving the lower valley in 1889. Looker prepared a revised version of this plan in 1899 and the Senate Park Commission heartily endorsed the concept two years later. By the end of the nineteenth century, lower Rock Creek valley had become an eyesore and public health hazard. The area between the zoo and Q Street remained attractively wooded, and Charles Glover had acquired a portion of the creek valley north of Massachusetts Avenue to donate to the government as a public park, but below P Street the valley served as a sewer and public dumping ground. Towering banks of ashes, street-sweepings, and construction debris choked the valley. Cheap wood houses and tenements crowded the banks between M and P streets. Coal heaps, gas tanks, and small factories lined the lower portion of the creek and the Potomac waterfront. Not only would a parkway along Rock Creek provide an attractive access to the park from one of the most populous regions of the city, it would transform an eyesore and public health menace into an urban park that would improve Washington's image and benefit the residents on either side of the valley, who could use it as a local park whether they had access to private pleasure vehicles or not. While the parkway drives would principally benefit carriage owners and motorists, Looker suggested that an affordable public car service could operate along the parkway from M street to the park.⁶⁹

While the Board of Trade and the Senate Park Commission favored the idea of cleaning up the creek and restoring the valley to a semblance of its original condition, another faction, led primarily by Georgetown businessmen proposed enclosing the creek in a conduit and filling in the valley to create a level connection between Washington and Georgetown. An impressive boulevard would follow the approximate course of the creek, providing a more formally landscaped connection between Rock Creek Park and the Potomac River. The two sides advanced their arguments in a succession of petitions, studies, and legislative proposals. The first detailed parkway plans accompanied a 1908 study supervised by Major Morrow, which definitively rejected the filled-valley treatment as aesthetically inappropriate, functionally inferior, and financially unsound. Even after the treatment was agreed upon, parkway promoters had to fight same reluctance on the part of Congress to fund improvements to Washington's park system that had held up the creation of Rock Creek Park. Congress did not authorize the parkway until 1913 and then appropriated funds at such a parsimonious level that the land acquisition process dragged on into the 1920s and the parkway was not completed until 1936.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Looker's 1899 report to the Washington Board of Trade was reprinted as an appendix to Cox, 145-48.

⁷⁰ The history of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is recounted at length in Timothy Davis, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," HAER Report No. DC-697, (Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., 1992).

ROCK CREEK PARK ROAD SYSTEM

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In the meantime, the Rock Creek Park Board of Control continued with its efforts to upgrade the road system within the park itself. The upper portion of Beach Drive between Military Road and the north end of Rock Creek Park was widened and macadamized during 1912 and 1913, at a total cost of \$16,574. This project required considerable regrading and some more heavy blasting, even though the terrain in the upper part of Rock Creek valley was generally less rugged than in the lower portion. The 2.3 mile long roadway was graded to a width of 24' and surfaced with a 16'-wide macadam pavement. The stone for the 6" thick macadam surface was quarried from an out-of-the-way location within the park and prepared with a portable crusher. Work was also begun on Wise Road, which connected Daniel Road and upper Beach Drive and was intended to provide another paved entrance to the northern part of the park. As of June 30, 1913, the park road system was comprised of 1.9 miles of macadamized county roads, open to all traffic; 8.2 miles of macadamized park roads, restricted to light pleasure vehicles; and one mile of dirt roads from which all motor vehicles were prohibited. Ross Drive was the sole remaining unpaved road of significance within the park. The park also contained approximately twenty-two miles of bridle paths and five miles of footpaths. Many of these trails followed old farm and woods roads that predated the park. At Grabill's insistence, a level, well-improved footpath had been cleared and graded on the east side of Beach Drive between Military Road and the zoo in 1909 to protect pedestrians from vehicular traffic. The grading and paving of Wise Road was completed in 1914. Preparations were begun to construct a driveway along Piney Branch to provide a major park entrance from Sixteenth Street, but it would be a number of years before this project moved beyond the preliminary clearing and grading stages. When the Board of Control transferred responsibility for Rock Creek Park to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds of the National Capital in 1918, only bridle and foot paths and the remnant tracks of a few old vernacular roads extended along Piney Branch Parkway, which had regained its original name after the Biddle Parkway designation failed to take hold in common usage.⁷¹

During its final years in charge of the park, the Board of Control continued to upgrade existing roads and explore additional means of accommodating the growing number of motorists and other park visitors. Park management continued to express its desire to preserve the park's unique scenic qualities, but its actions demonstrated that the interests of the rapidly increasing motoring public took precedence over previous commitments to avoid additional construction in sensitive areas such as the winding valley of Rock Creek between Military Road and the zoo. By 1914, Grabill was again observing that vehicular traffic was increasing faster than expected, making it necessary to widen existing roadways and construct additional routes to reduce pressure on the park's main driveways. Grabill also noted a significant increase in the number of pedestrians in the park, suggesting that the institution of public car service along with efforts to

⁷¹ "Report of Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park" for the years 1909-1916 in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

publicize the park's accessibility by streetcar had finally begun to bring a broader cross-section of Washingtonians into the park. Grabill advised that several new east-west routes were being contemplated to encourage traffic to enter and exit the park in various locations and open up additional territory to motorists, particularly in the north end of the park. The old roadway between Ridge Road and Broad Branch Road, now known as Grant Road, was macadamized in fiscal year 1915. Ross Drive was also finally regraded, widened, and macadamized. When it was opened to automobile traffic in September 1915, there were no longer any narrow, old-fashioned gravel roads where recreationalists driving horse-drawn vehicles could escape the ever-increasing crowds of motorists.⁷²

The next major concession to motorists was the widening and straightening of Beach Drive below Military Road, which was accomplished during 1917, when the roadway was closed throughout most of its length while the District of Columbia constructed a trunk sewer along Rock Creek. Despite admonitions dating back to the Senate Park Commission report that any additional widening of Beach Drive through the narrowest portion of the valley would represent an unacceptable infringement on the scenic qualities of Rock Creek, Grabill approved the construction on the grounds that the original driveway between Broad Branch and Military Road was "so narrow as to considerably restrict the speed and endanger the safety of vehicles and passengers when the traffic was heavy." Only three years earlier, Grabill had stated that the existing road could not be widened "without excessive cost and destruction of natural scenery," which, he noted, was "prohibited in the Act creating the park."⁷³

As Grabill predicted, widening Beach Drive necessitated the construction of long sections of retaining wall to extend the roadway into the original creek bed. While the reconstruction of Beach Drive consumed most of the engineers' attention during 1917, preparations were also begun to construct a new road into the park from Rittenhouse Street to provide another west-side entrance to the upper portion of the park. On the east side of the park, the narrow, twisting, and steep Morrow Drive was regraded, widened, and repaved in May 1918 to bring it up to automobile standards. Grabill also expressed a desire to replace the remaining fords with bridges and to construct additional roads along several of the small stream valleys formed by minor tributaries to Rock Creek. Street car access continued to be a major concern, despite the rising

⁷² "Report of Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1915"; Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

⁷³ "Report of Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1915"; after June 30, 1915, Grabill switched to monthly reports until his office was eliminated at the end of fiscal year 1918; both series of reports are in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

prominence of the automobile. Grabill advised that, if it were determined that street car lines were necessary, they should be confined to the exterior of the park and not penetrate the heart of the valley. Acknowledging public sentiment in favor of constructing one or more lines into the park, he agreed that "a line crossing the park, or one running within sight of the creek for a short distance, would add greatly to the pleasure and convenience of visitors." With careful planning, he suggested, such lines "could be so arranged as to detract not too much from the natural beauty." Grabill prepared a map displaying several options. The most feasible route descended from Calvert Street along Adams Mill Road, skirting the zoo along the old line of Peirce Mill Road and terminating near the mill, where a picnic ground could be developed to accommodate the crowds drawn by trolley service. A line could also be constructed up the other side of the valley, most easily along Broad Branch. Grabill also depicted several cross-park routes, which would afford glimpses of park scenery while serving an important utilitarian function in facilitating traffic between the neighborhoods fast developing on either side of the park. Grabill advised that any cross park routes be confined to single lines carried on trestles, rather than at grade or on earthen embankments, which would pose unacceptable defacements to the scenery of Rock Creek Park.⁷⁴ Any action on either the development of street car lines or the expansion and improvement of the park's road system, Grabill asserted in an April 1917 memorandum to the secretary of the park's Board of Control, should await the completion of a comprehensive development plan.⁷⁵ The existing improvements had been made in a piecemeal fashion in response to heavy pressure to open the park to public use as rapidly as possible. Much of the work had been of a temporary character and had proven to be obsolete almost as soon as it was completed, necessitating constant maintenance or expensive reconstruction that interfered with public use, turned the park into a continual construction zone, and consumed most of the park's budget. It was hard to fault the park's engineers for this, given the low level of congressional appropriations and the unexpected proliferation of automobile traffic, but Grabill and the Board of Control agreed that future improvements should be based on a long-term plan designed to accommodate demands on park resources for the foreseeable future.

The 1918 Olmsted Brothers Report

In response to the general agreement that a more comprehensive management plan was

⁷⁴ Grabill, monthly reports Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

⁷⁵ Memorandum, L.R. Grabill to Secretary, Board of Control, Rock Creek Park, 19 April 1917, in Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park; Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Entry 245, RG 42, National Archives.

needed, the Board of Control engaged the Olmsted Brothers firm in May 1917 to develop a master plan for the future development and maintenance of Rock Creek Park. A preliminary report was submitted in September 1917 and the final version was completed in December 1918.⁷⁶ The Olmsted Brothers report was immediately adopted as the official policy statement for the management of Rock Creek Park in matters large and small. The report strongly influenced succeeding generations of park managers and continues to serve as a foundational document for contemporary resource management planning. The Olmsted Brothers report for Rock Creek Park is also significant as one of the earliest--if not the first--attempt to devise a comprehensive master plan for the development of a national park. The master plan concept would become an essential element of National Park Service policy in the mid 1920s. The Olmsted Brothers report's insistence that the key to park planning lay in the identification and enhancement of the innate scenic qualities of different landscape units, together with its strong emphasis on the importance of patient landscape forestry work, owed a strong debt to Charles Eliot's late-nineteenth-century reports for the Boston metropolitan park system. The report's open-ended quality as a series of general development guidelines rather than a detailed and finite design proposal bore the unmistakable stamp of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s belief that landscape planning was an ongoing process of continuing adjustments to changing circumstances rather than a single act of creation followed by routine maintenance. While the Olmsted Brothers firm was the official author of the report, John C. Olmsted was in failing health by this time. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who had developed an extensive familiarity with both the geography of Rock Creek and the general park needs of Washington through his service on the Senate Park Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, was undoubtedly responsible for most, if not all, of the report's content.⁷⁷

The Olmsted report began by stating "The dominant consideration, never to be subordinated to any other purpose in dealing with Rock Creek Park, is the permanent preservation of its wonderful natural beauty, and the making of that beauty accessible to the

⁷⁶ The Board of Control paid Olmsted Brothers \$3,000 for this report. (Letter, W. F. Conklin to Daniel E. Garges, Chief Clerk, Engineering Department, D.C., 15 November 1918; letter, Olmsted Brothers to C. S. Ridley, Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, 13 December 1918; both in Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives).

⁷⁷ For more on the National Park Service's master plan policy, see McClelland, Presenting Nature, 173-79; for one of the few published analyses of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s approach to landscape planning, see Jon A. Peterson, "Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.: The Visionary and the Professional," in Planning the Twentieth-Century North American City, ed. Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 37-54; John C. Olmsted's career is recounted in James Sturgis Pray, "John C. Olmsted: A Minute on his Life and Service Prepared for the Board of Trustees of the American Society of Landscape Architects," Landscape Architecture 12 (April 1922): 129-33.

people without spoiling the scenery in the process.”⁷⁸ In language and spirit, this statement bore a strong resemblance to the underlying proposition of the 1916 act creating the National Park Service, which stated that the agency’s guiding principle should be “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” This is not surprising, since Olmsted was responsible for the park service’s foundational document as well. The strong parallel between these two statements underscores Rock Creek Park’s under-appreciated relationship to the more conventional, non-urban reservations of the National Park System.

The inherent tension between the two conflicting goals of preservation and access has continued to present a challenge to park managers both in urban reservations such as Rock Creek Park and in the larger elements of the National Park System throughout the country. The Olmsted report elaborated upon this paradox in an introductory section explicating the basic reasons for which public reservations like Rock Creek Park were created. “The essential justification for this large park is unquestionably found in the recreative values of its wild or ‘undeveloped’ qualities,” the report declared. “. . . and no use or exploitation or development of any sort can ever be right that is not based on that fundamental conception.” Olmsted asserted that the basic goal of park management should be to preserve and enhance the beauty of the park’s predominantly natural scenery. At the same time, he observed, the underlying justification of a public park was to make such scenery accessible to the public, in the belief that contact with nature had a positive effect on the health and spirits of an increasingly urbanized populace. Parks did not exist solely to preserve natural scenery as an abstract good in and of itself, nor could they be justified as seldom-visited domains accessible only to those with the time and means to enjoy them via expensive conveyance or strenuous physical labor. By the early twentieth century, traditional notions about the transcendental value of nature were giving way to more pragmatic concerns about the social and physical benefits of active outdoor recreation, but parks were still viewed in a thoroughly anthropocentric manner based on the benefits they provided to the public. The Olmsted report combined traditional explication of scenic values with recommendations for the development of modern recreational facilities in locations where they would not disturb the park’s natural beauties. The report asserted that Rock Creek Park needed only minor improvements to realize its potential as perhaps the most impressive assortment of picturesquely varied scenery within easy reach of a major metropolitan area, but it also underscored that “no matter how perfect the scenery of the Park may become, no matter how high its potential value, that value remains potential except insofar as it is enjoyed by

⁷⁸ “Rock Creek Park: A report by Olmsted Brothers, December 1918,” foreword (complete copy with accompanying maps in U.S. Department of the Interior Library, Washington, D.C.; additional copies of text in Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-1952, Entry 17, RG 66, National Archives); henceforth cited as “Olmsted Brothers Report.”

a large and ever larger numbers of people, poor and rich alike.”⁷⁹ While the Olmsted report urged caution at all times and emphasized the need for careful consideration of the impact of any construction within the park, it acknowledged the necessity “for more intensive use of the Park, and for more ready accessibility.”⁸⁰

The report presented a three-part strategy for maximizing the park’s potential. To begin with, a comprehensive strategy was needed to improve and safeguard the park’s scenery. The bulk of the report was devoted to identifying the essential natural characteristics of every area within the park and devising general guidelines for basic forest management and landscape treatment. Some areas were so intrinsically picturesque as to need only minor selective cutting and pruning to improve vistas and expose hidden beauties to public view. Much of the interior creek valley was in this more or less ideal condition, where the main burden on management was to ensure that the existing beauty was preserved from incompatible development. Large areas of the park, however, consisted of dense, second growth woodlands and recovering farm land. Such areas could be improved by selectively weeding out excessive growth and keeping attractive meadows open by removing invasive scrub pine and other fast-growing, unattractive species. Another problem was the unsightly presence of large amounts of dead trees and downed timber. Periodic fires and the devastating chestnut blight, together with many years of minimal maintenance, had contributed to this situation, which posed not just an embarrassing eyesore but a serious fire hazard. The Olmsted report advised that eliminating this menace should be one of the most urgent priorities of the park management forces. The report recommended that an experienced professional forester should be hired to oversee the improvement, rehabilitation, and improvement of the park’s woodlands. While most of the park should be devoted to more or less natural landscapes, the report conceded that the high plateau on the east side of the park adjacent to the Brightwood neighborhood was well adapted for the development of more intensive recreational areas including tennis courts, ball fields, and facilities for band concerts and other public entertainments. These recommendations were eventually fulfilled with the development of the Brightwood Recreation Area and the Carter Barron Amphitheater. The report advised that another section of high ground that was also visually isolated from the creek valley, the rolling fields on the east side of the park north of Military Road, should be kept open to provide a pastoral contrast to the sylvan scenery at the heart of the park. This wish was partially fulfilled with the creation of a public golf course on this site in the 1920s. As for Rock Creek itself, which the report described as “topographically and psychologically the backbone” of the park, every effort should be made to avoid injuring “the present charm and beauty of this valley scenery.”⁸¹ The main problem with the existing scenery at the heart of the valley was that the

⁷⁹ “Olmsted Brothers Report,” 1-2.

⁸⁰ “Olmsted Brothers Report,” 10.

⁸¹ “Olmsted Brothers Report,” 11.

vegetation was so lush it obscured much of the potential beauty of the creek. The report cautioned against any wholesale cutting of trees and shrubs along the creek. All that was needed was the selective cutting of a few branches here and there, the elimination of "a bush or two," and the removal of "an obstructing tree here and there."⁸² Again and again, the Olmsted report emphasized, the key to the proper development of the scenic resources of Rock Creek Park was to engage and retain a small force of well-trained professionals, who would develop an intimate knowledge of the park's scenery and make the detailed decisions in accordance with their own expert judgement and the general principles outlined in the 1918 report.

The second of the report's three major sections addressed the problems of road and path improvements within the park. While Olmsted Brothers had been engaged primarily to address general landscape management concerns, the issue of road development lay at the heart of the tension between preservation and access. The Olmsted report assumed that the number of roads, paths, and trails within Rock Creek Park would have to increase as the population of Washington expanded and the park continued to grow in popularity. The inevitable expansion of the park's road system and the growing pressure on the existing roads created an even greater need to exercise care and artistry in all aspects of road improvement. Once again, the report set out some general principles of park road design before considering specific locations for potential road development. While the report asserted that "the Park must be opened up to the driving, riding, and walking public," it immediately cautioned "the roads, paths, and other accompaniments of intensive use must be so located and so built that the essential qualities of the Park are impaired in the least possible degree."⁸³ Roads and paths were essential to the public enjoyment of the park, but like other artificial structures such as bridges, picnic shelters, benches, and buildings, they should be visually unobtrusive and infringe on the park scenery as little as possible. Park roads should conform to the suggestions of the existing topography and vegetation, appearing to follow a natural and inevitable line of least resistance, rather than pursue an arbitrary course in defiance of natural features. Roads and paths, the report declared, "should always and unmistakably fit into the landscape as harmonious and subordinate parts of the scenery through which they pass."⁸⁴ Pleasure drivers may have found varied enjoyments in speeding along the sinuous, smooth, and largely interruption-free park roads, but according to the Olmsted Report, the roads in Rock Creek Park were "primarily a means to an end," whose basic function was to "enable the people to enjoy the refreshing beauty of park scenery."⁸⁵ Park roads should not merely focus on moving vehicles from place to place, therefore, they should be laid out in such a

⁸² "Olmsted Brothers Report," 30.

⁸³ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 2.

⁸⁴ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 33.

⁸⁵ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 33.

way as to "exhibit to the maximum the beauty and variety and charm of the scenery."⁸⁶ Great care should be taken to expand and improve the park's road system only to the extent that this end was accomplished in a safe and relaxing manner, without a sense of overcrowding or pressure to speed to keep up with other traffic. Again, excessive caution was preferable to overdevelopment. Given that the primary justification for road-building was to reveal the beauties of the park, the report declared, "If in the process they inflict injury upon that scenery or distract attention from it to their own assertive qualities, by just so much do they fail of their primary purpose."⁸⁷ Since roads were "seldom beautiful in themselves," the report declared, it was "doubly important that they take a congruous and subordinate place in the landscape."⁸⁸ While motor road construction clearly posed the greatest threat to park scenery, the report cautioned that similar concerns pertained to the development of bridle trails and pedestrian paths.

Observing that "the present roads are already becoming crowded," the 1918 Olmsted report repeated the basic conclusion of the 1901 Senate Park Commission report, advising that the best solution to overcrowding in Rock Creek Park was to spread the traffic more evenly throughout the park by building additional roadways rather than attempt to widen existing roads, which would have disastrous consequences for some of the park's most prized scenery.⁸⁹ Attempting to widen Beach Drive or the newer roadways along the steep sides of the valley would cause "unreasonably serious injury to those very landscape beauties for the appreciation of which the roads are primarily built."⁹⁰ While the ultimate solution to the problem of increased traffic was "narrow roads and more of them," the report advised that the institution of one-way traffic regulations might also prove useful in helping to move a greater volume of cars through the park more safely and efficiently.⁹¹ The map accompanying the report depicted an elaborate network of additional park drives, most of which seem excessive and needlessly destructive of park scenery to later eyes, though they were justified in part as means of exhibiting the landscape beauties of some of the more inaccessible areas of the park. The most striking proposed addition south of Military Road was a driveway along the east side of the valley located midway between Beach Drive and the park border. North of Military Road, both sides of the valley were laced with serpentine drives, most of which followed ridges and minor stream valleys or provided access to hilltops that could be opened up to provide scenic vistas. Two of the longest proposed

⁸⁶ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 33.

⁸⁷ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 33.

⁸⁸ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 33-34.

⁸⁹ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 35.

⁹⁰ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 35.

⁹¹ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 35.

drives traced winding courses from Military Road to the north end of the park on either side of the valley. These were clearly intended to relieve traffic on Beach Drive as a means of warding off future threats to widen the road at the expense of the scenery along Rock Creek. Since this elaborate road network appears to contradict the 1918 report's repeated insistence that the preservation of park scenery should be the dominant concern of park managers, it is important to point out that the plan was prepared at a transitional period in park design history, when the impact of the automobile was not yet fully apparent. Such an intricate and extensive road system was in keeping with the design principles of nineteenth-century parks, where the narrow, winding roadways could be constructed with minimal disruption to the existing scenery and the labyrinthine quality of the circuitous routes psychologically enhanced the apparent size of the park. By the early 1920s, however, the proliferation of automobile traffic, together with the growing size and speed of motor vehicles required wider, straighter, more substantially constructed roadway, so that park managers reversed the Olmsted Brothers' 1918 formula and began to construct wider roads, but fewer.⁹²

Of the roads suggested in the Olmsted Brothers' report, only Bingham Drive and Piney Branch Parkway were eventually constructed. Both were already under consideration when the report was commissioned. Bingham Drive, entering the west side of the park from Rittenhouse Street, was described as "a more or less urgent construction project" and the report included a plan showing a typical section to serve as a model, not just for its development, but for the construction of additional roadways within the park.⁹³ In keeping with the belief that good park design was not based on generic prescriptions but on the application of general principles to exigencies of each particular site, the report stressed that both the grading plan and the proposed road locations were merely suggestive guidelines in need of future refinement based on detailed examinations of each individual situation. The report did, however, comment on a few specific problems discovered during the examination of the park's existing roads. The report

⁹² The impact of automobiles on park design was a prominent topic in the professional park literature of the time, generating numerous journal articles including: Arthur A. Shurtleff, "The Effect of the Automobile on the Design of Parks," Landscape Architecture 11 (April 1921): 111-114; Charles W. Eliot II, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," Landscape Architecture 13 (October 1922): 27-37; S. R. DeBoer, "Automobiles in Park Road Design," Parks and Recreation 6 (May-June 1923): 421-22; S. R. Deboer, "Automobiles in Parks," Parks and Recreation 7 (July-August 1924): 582-83; Thomas MacDonald, "Modern Road Construction for Public Parks," Parks and Recreation 8 (November-December 1924): 104-08; G. Hennenhofer, "Automobile Problems: Ideas Differ as to Large Park Development," Parks and Recreation 8 (January-February 1925): 234-37; Albert Turner, "Motor Cars and Parks," Parks and Recreation 11 (Sept-Oct 1927): 7-10; Phelps Wyman, "New Tendencies in Park Design," Parks and Recreation 11 (March-April 1928): 252-59; the automobile issue received considerable attention in contemporary studies such as Arthur A. Shurtleff, Future Parks, Playgrounds and Parkways (Boston: Boston Park Department, 1925) and Lee F. Hanmer, Public Recreation: A Study of Parks, Playgrounds and Other Outdoor Recreation Facilities, Vol. 5, Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs (New York: Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1928).

⁹³ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 46.

recommended a minor readjustment of the junction of Morrow Drive with Military Road and Beach Drive for safety purposes along with several slight changes in the alignment of Beach Drive north of Milkhouse Ford. Asserting that the road in this area was "not successfully fitted to the landscape through which it passes," the report suggested minor adjustments designed to "make the lines more harmonious" and "bring the drive into closer and happier relation with the creek nearby." The report also recommended selective thinning of the vegetation along the drives throughout the park. Inadequate maintenance had allowed "dense impenetrable walls of foliage" to grow up along the roadways, obscuring potentially attractive scenery and presenting a monotonous and generally unattractive effect, so that, in many locations "The driveway now is all too much like a tunnel passing through the forest, and too little like a way within it."⁹⁴ Selective cutting was necessary to create the desirable effect of an attractive progression of varied views, with alternations between light and shade, lengthy vistas and intimate enclosures, and occasional lateral views revealing the sylvan scenery of the forest floor. "Without such subtle assistance," Olmsted remonstrated, "the beauty and value of these wonderful forests will remain only half known and less than half enjoyed."⁹⁵

The 1918 Olmsted report embraced the prevailing view that the construction of one or more street car lines through the park was both necessary and desirable to ensure that as many people as possible could enjoy the scenery of Rock Creek. "Adequate transportation must be provided to and into the park for people dependent upon street car service," the report declared, placing this issue alongside the construction of roadways for private pleasure vehicles and the preservation and enhancement of natural scenery as the three major concerns of park managers.⁹⁶ The public transit question was combined with the issue of providing additional general purpose roadways across the park to accommodate the utilitarian traffic that was prohibited from park roads. From a practical transportation standpoint, a major problem with large urban parks was that they disrupted utilitarian traffic patterns. Rock Creek Park was favorably situated in that its radial orientation posed little problem for the heavier traffic moving into and out of the city, but the park presented a formidable obstacle to cross-town traffic in the city's northwest quadrant. With the growth of the neighborhoods on either side of Rock Creek Park and the general advancement of commerce and transportation in the Washington area, it seemed prudent to consider additional east-west thoroughfares to supplement Military Road, which provided the only public highway across the park. Since these thoroughfares would have to be relatively wide, straight, and evenly graded to accommodate trucks and large volumes of traffic, they would provide the most logical location for street car lines. These trolley lines would perform the dual function of providing access to the park while serving as useful components of the city's

⁹⁴ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 27.

⁹⁵ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 27.

⁹⁶ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 2.

broader public transportation system. The main considerations in developing these cross-park routes, the report maintained, were to provide maximum public access while constructing the thoroughfares "in that manner and that location which will intrude least into the natural landscape."⁹⁷ The report proposed two potential routes based on the park's topography, the surrounding street system, and the location of existing trolley lines. The favored route followed the ridge that lay just south of Military Road, connecting Utah Avenue on the west side of the park with Madison Street to the east. The Fourteenth Street trolley line could be extended to meet this cross-park line, which could easily be continued to link up with the Connecticut Avenue lines on the west side of the park. Aside from its practical transportation value this line would provide access to the attractively wooded scenery in an under-developed portion of the park. The other line would cross the park from Yuma Street to Taylor Street, providing an intermediate route between the existing Calvert Street bridge and the proposed mid-park line. This line would be of little use in providing access to the park, since it would have to cross the steep and narrow valley on a trestle or viaduct, but it would serve as a useful extension of the Mount Pleasant street car line to the west side of the park. The report rejected the idea of constructing either of the cross-park thoroughfares at grade level. While this approach would better serve the purpose of providing direct access to the park, it was unacceptable on both practical and aesthetic grounds. Unless massive excavations were conducted to overcome the obstacles presented by the valley's rugged terrain, the grades would be too steep and the alignments too circuitous for the thoroughfares to function efficiently as utilitarian highways and street car lines. Even moderate grading and construction would cause unacceptable damage to the park's scenery. The report also objected to the intrusion of noisy trucks and trolleys into the "very heart of the park."⁹⁸

While the Olmsted report's recommendations on road improvements and general development guidelines would exert a strong influence on subsequent park management policies, the section on thoroughfares and street car lines was soon forgotten. The public transit problem was a paramount concern for park managers during the 1910s, but the issue of providing street car access to the park would soon fade in importance as the rapid growth of automobile ownership enabled a much larger portion of the Washington public to enjoy the benefits of Rock Creek Park. Military Road continued to function as the primary cross-park thoroughfare, supplemented to a minor degree by Klinge Road, Porter Street, Tilden Street, and Park Road which remained open to general purpose traffic as official city streets, and Wise Road, which was maintained by park forces but was opened to utilitarian traffic to provide a route across the

⁹⁷ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 2.

⁹⁸ "Olmsted Brothers Report," 43.

north end of the park.⁹⁹ No new utilitarian highways were constructed across the park until the controversial completion of the Capital Beltway in the 1960s.

While the Olmsted Brothers were preparing their report, Rock Creek Park was absorbed into the general park system of the District of Columbia. Transportation improvements completed under the administration of the Board of Control had amounted to approximately 9.2 miles of macadamized park roads ranging in width from 16'- 24', twenty-three miles of bridle paths, and six miles of footpaths. The principal park roads completed by 1918 were Beach Drive, Ridge Road, Ross Road, Morrow Road, Blagden Avenue, and Wise Road (this was the name given to the road at the north end of the park connecting Beach Drive and Chevy Chase). An additional 1.9 miles of pre-existing public roads had been improved. The public roads leading into or through Rock Creek Park were Military Road, Peirce Mill Road, and Linnaean Hill Road. Under the direction of the Board of Control, Rock Creek had been bridged with three permanent stone and concrete bridges and one temporary girder bridge, while five masonry bridges or viaducts were constructed across minor streams and ravines. Numerous culverts were also constructed, along with two wood bridges and a several footbridges. Milkhouse Ford had been provided with a concrete base, and several other fords in the park had also been preserved.¹⁰⁰ Having accomplished its mission of acquiring the park and overseeing its initial improvement, the Board of Control was dissolved and on September 16, 1918 the park's management was entrusted to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G), which was then headed by Col. Clarence S. Ridley of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Grabill was no longer directly involved in Rock Creek Park matters. Frances F. Gillen, civilian superintendent of the OPB&G, took control of the daily oversight of Rock Creek Park.¹⁰¹ Despite this change in administration, the Olmsted Brothers report was soon adopted as the official policy document governing the management of the park's roads and scenic resources. On February 1, 1919, Ridley circulated a memorandum declaring "nothing will be done hereafter in this park which is contrary to the letter or spirit of this report without specific approval in writing of the Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds." Ridley created an advisory board of OPB&G landscape experts to ensure that the report's recommendations were carried out in a "logical, continuous, and artistic manner." Ridley appointed James G. Langdon and Irving Payne to serve in this role. Both men were civilian employees of the OPB&G. Langdon was a longtime Olmsted associate who had worked on the Boston park system and was brought to Washington

⁹⁹ Memo, Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia to Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, 27 September 1918, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives.

¹⁰⁰ Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . . in the District of Columbia, Extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1925 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), 1943.

¹⁰¹ Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 20.

in 1915 to help prepare plans for the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.¹⁰² Payne had graduated from Harvard University's School of Landscape Architecture in 1917, where he would have been strongly influenced by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. He began working for the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in September 1918.¹⁰³ Payne and Langdon were instructed to study the Olmsted Brothers' report, conduct detailed inspections of the park landscape, and prepare specific work plans in light of the report's recommendations, taking the park's limited budget into account. They were also supposed to keep close tabs on all work in progress and consult closely with the landscape architecture expert on the Commission of Fine Arts, who would serve in an advisory role on aesthetic matters.¹⁰⁴

The Commission of Fine Arts, which had been formed in 1910 to safeguard the legacy of the Senate Park Commission by advising on matters affecting the appearance and improvement of federal property in the District of Columbia, embraced the Olmsted Brothers report and praised it as a masterful explication of park management policy.¹⁰⁵ John Greenleaf, the commission's landscape architecture expert, made a detailed study of the report and then motored the length of Rock Creek Park with Ridley to examine the park's condition in light of the report's recommendations. Greenleaf heartily endorsed the Olmsted Brothers recommendations and strongly urged that every effort be made to ensure that the report play an active role in park management and not simply be "buried in the files," as was often the case

¹⁰² The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds hired Langdon in April 1915 as a "Landscape Architectural Designer" with a salary of \$3,000 a year. Langdon had worked for the Olmsted firm for decades, serving as one of the senior Olmsted's chief designers during the development of the Riverway and other elements of the Boston park system. He had also recently worked for the Charlottesville and Albermarle Railway, where he designed a residential subdivision. In October 1916, he was assigned as landscape architect and engineer to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, with an increase in salary to \$3,600 a year. He resigned from federal employment in June 1921. (Letter, John Livers, President, Charlottesville and Albermarle Railway Company, to Sherrill, 17 September 1921; Letter, Sherrill to Livers 30 September 1921, Office of the Engineers Document File, 1894-1923, RG 77, National Archives; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982], 152).

¹⁰³ Payne was hired as a landscape architect at the salary of \$200 a month. He was granted a leave-of-absence to do postgraduate work at the Cornell University summer school in July-August 1921. (Letter, Ridley to Chief of Engineers, 26 August 1918; memorandum, Sherrill to Chief of Engineers, 21 June 1921; Office of the Chief of Engineers Document File, 1894-1923, Record Group 77, National Archives).

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum, Col. C. S. Ridley, 1 February 1919, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42, National Archives.

¹⁰⁵ It should be pointed out that Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., served not only as the landscape architecture expert for the Senate Park Commission, but as the first landscape architect on the Commission of Fine Arts, holding that position from 1910-1918.

with such general planning documents.¹⁰⁶

Greenleaf prepared a statement for Ridley elaborating the report's major conclusions and adding a few supplementary suggestions of his own. Greenleaf insisted the report's recommendations be ingrained into the thinking of park management forces. He suggested that the report be "abstracted in printed form and read daily as their bible by those immediately in responsible charge of maintenance of woodland and meadow" in order that "the points stated become matters of instinctive feeling rather than of argument and exert their influence inevitably on every daily decision and action." Greenleaf reiterated the report's statement of "dominant motives" and elaborated on the basic contradiction between the goals of preservation and access, observing that the two concerns were "inevitably opposed in any naturalistic park." Taking a more pessimistic view than Olmsted, he predicted that finding the proper balance between development and scenic preservation would become increasingly problematic as the city's population grew. Greenleaf came down even more forcefully on the side of minimal development. Paraphrasing and literally underscoring the Olmsted report's fundamental supposition, he asserted "Features of utility are necessary that the park may be of use, but always there must be dominant a clear appreciation of its natural charm and a determination that it shall not be sacrificed" [emphasis in original]. The construction of additional roads and other structures should be minimized. Roads and other constructions, Greenleaf advised, should be handled "with great caution and restraint." Where they were absolutely necessary, new roads should be "thoughtfully placed and carefully graded so as to meet the needs and be as unobtrusive as possible." They should be designed to harmonize with the natural scenery of the park, but the overwrought rusticity of structures like Boulder Bridge should be avoided. Demonstrating the growing preference for simpler forms and minimal ornamentation, Greenleaf warned "designs made so rustic as to be straining for that effect are unsatisfactory" and cautioned that park structures "should not be wildly rustic in a vain attempt to blend in with woodland scenery." The most desirable approach, Greenleaf added, was to "limit artificial structures and keep them as simple as possible."¹⁰⁷

Greenleaf was less accommodating than Olmsted when it came to recommending features designed to make the park more accessible to the general public. While the Olmsteds firmly believed that parks should be made accessible to the common people, both for their own benefit and for the good of society as a whole, it is not hard to detect an elitist strain in Greenleaf's commentary. Greenleaf insisted the Commission of Fine Arts was "in entire sympathy with the idea that the Park should be for the trolley public as well as for the users of

¹⁰⁶ Letter, Greenleaf to Charles Moore, 27 January 1919, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-1952, Entry 17, RG 66, National Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Greenleaf to Ridley, 6 February 1919, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52; Entry 17, Commission Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

motor cars," but he cautioned that developing trolley facilities would pose a threat to the "evanescent charm" of the park. That this charm may have consisted as much in the restriction of access to the privileged few as in the beauties of the park's natural scenery is suggested by Greenleaf's admonition, "A few false steps taken with the best of motives, in the interests of the public, can lead to the commonplace vulgar conditions of an amusement park and destroy the real values." Greenleaf condescended to accommodate popular demand by approving the construction of picnic grounds in carefully prescribed locations, but warned that the pressure to develop facilities to cater to the common tastes of the larger public represented an "ever present danger" that required "a well balanced firm control of the situation as it develops from year to year." With the demand for trolley facilities fast receding, the most pressing threat, in Greenleaf's view, was a proposal to establish a public camping facility for automobile tourists within the park. The OPB&G was investigating means of accommodating the rapidly growing number of auto-camping tourists visiting Washington, and both Rock Creek Park and the valley of Piney Branch seemed to be likely candidates for a government-sponsored tourist camp. The Commission of Fine Arts found this idea so contemptible as to be almost beneath consideration. Greenleaf remonstrated, "Need we state the serious objections to this proposal? Even in great parks like the Yellowstone such parking and camping places are necessary evils, that grate upon one's sensibilities. In the narrow, charming river valley of Rock Creek Park they would be an unmitigated, vulgar intrusion upon its sylvan beauty." Admitting that the OPB&G had to do something to accommodate the growing fad for autocamping, Greenleaf asserted, "If parking places for this laudable purpose are to be provided let the city take unused land that is not vital to scenic efforts, and so develop it. The valley of Rock Creek must be held inviolate" [emphasis in original]. At most, Greenleaf declared, autocampers might be consigned "one or two limited spaces in the secluded sections of the Park--if they could be found." While Greenleaf took a dim view of motor camping facilities and amusement grounds, which were frequented primarily by members of the middle and lower classes, he expressed support for developments catering to more refined tastes. Greenleaf endorsed a proposal for the construction of a tea house within the park on the bluff overlooking the Brightwood reservoir. Observing that the tea house would provide "a nucleus for the society of Washington in the afternoons of Spring and Fall," he declared the structure to be compatible with the planned development of the west side of the park. The tea house was apparently never constructed, but Greenleaf's support for the project underscored the elitist sensibilities of the Commission of Fine Arts. The OPB&G's successor agency, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, developed an extensive public tourist camp on Hains Point in the 1920s, complete with tourist cabins, tent and trailer spots, and a central lodge structure. The location was not as scenic or as sheltering as Rock Creek Park, but the camp posed little threat to the largely artificial landscape of East Potomac Park. It was also more accessible to major highways and to the museums and monuments of downtown Washington.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Greenleaf to Ridley, 6 February 1919, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52; Entry 17, Commission Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives; the East Potomac Park tourist camp was

Greenleaf concluded his review of the Olmsted Brothers report by strongly seconding the recommendation that the park be put in charge of "a man of imagination and artistic training," who would be able to combine his knowledge and intuition with the overall goals expressed in the report. Suggesting that the park had not been properly managed in the past and expressing a growing concern that it was still not being governed in an informed and consistent manner, Greenleaf advised that it was imperative to employ professional landscape experts and pursue "a systematic and thoroughgoing policy of upkeep of woodland as well as the drives." The Olmsted Brothers report, Greenleaf declared, should serve as the foundation for all future maintenance and improvement decisions.¹⁰⁹

The appointment of Payne and Langdon as advisors to the park maintenance forces was a step in the right direction, but both men were more directly occupied with developing plans for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and other projects throughout the D.C. park system. Payne and Langdon closely supervised the development of the next major roadway project in the park--the west-side connection between Beach Drive and Chevy Chase that would eventually be known as Bingham Drive--but they were less successful in getting the park maintenance forces to undertake the general forestry work outlined in the Olmsted Brothers report. Both Greenleaf and Commission of Fine Arts chairman Charles Moore complained on several occasions over the next few years that the park's scenic resources were suffering acutely from inadequate maintenance. Moore and Greenleaf pointed out that Japanese honeysuckle and other invasive species were choking out more attractive growth, concealing the picturesque open woodlands behind jungle-walls of impenetrable vegetation. In March 1922, Greenleaf sharply rebuked Ridley's successor, Lt. Col. Clarence O. Sherrill, for the park forces' continued failure to carry out the scenery enhancement policies outlined in the Olmsted Brothers report. "There is a hillside at a western entrance to Rock Creek which, with its cedars rising against the sky was reminiscent of an Italian hill-side," Greenleaf intoned. "When I saw it three years ago, these cedars were shrieking under the throttling grasp of wild honey-suckle and tree weeds. Now as one passes he hears only a smothered moan. I call that hillside 'The Tragedy of the Cedars.'" An equally pressing problem was the continued presence of large amounts of dead timber, which posed an even greater safety hazard and eyesore than when the Olmsted had prepared his report. Park officers and grounds crews were apparently not even concerned with preserving the park's flowering trees and shrubs. Moore noted that when he motored through the park with a silvaculture expert from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they encountered numerous motorcars leaving the park laden with dogwoods and other flowers. Emphasizing the need to

established in 1921 and various improvements were made over the next few years (C. O. Sherrill, "Recreation in Public Parks," Parks and Recreation 8 [March-April 1925]: 393; photographs of the Hains Point tourist camp appear in U.S. Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1928 [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928]).

¹⁰⁹ Greenleaf to Ridley, 6 February 1919, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52; Entry 17, Commission Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

follow the recommendation of the Olmsted Brothers report and preserve and enhance the sylvan quality of Rock Creek Park, Greenleaf admonished Sherrill, "There can be no doubt that serious damage is occurring and this damage can be checked solely through intelligent and thorough handling."¹¹⁰

Sherrill did not take kindly to these criticisms. He asserted that he and the members of the park maintenance staff were fully conversant with the Olmsted Brothers report, and insisted that all their actions were governed accordingly. The main problem, he asserted, was Congress's continued unwillingness to provide adequate appropriations for the maintenance and improvement of Rock Creek Park. "There is no lack of a trained force, or control of a man of imagination and artistic feeling in handling the matters connected with Rock Creek Park," Sherrill protested. "The only difficulty is, and has been, that appropriations adequate to accomplish all the necessary work cannot be secured for the purpose. It is felt, however, that this work is being persecuted with intelligence and along proper lines and that during a period of years much improvement is accomplished."¹¹¹

Greenleaf immediately attempted to smooth Sherrill's ruffled feathers, insisting that he did not mean to impugn the intelligence or good intentions of the current park management. Greenleaf assured that the Commission of Fine Arts stood firmly behind the park management and agreed whole-heartedly that the improvement of Rock Creek Park had always been hampered by inexcusably low congressional appropriations. Greenleaf also noted that he had expressed all these concerns to Ridley, with whom he was on more familiar terms, and stated that Ridley had agreed with him on most matters and shown no personal offense or irritation. In private, however, he had expressed doubts about Ridley's abilities and the complacency of the park's custodians in general. While Ridley was still the supervising officer, Greenleaf briefed Moore, "Col. Ridley has difficulties of organization and administration. My fear is that the valuable ideas the Olmsted Report gives will never bear fruit under the deadening influence of daily routine." Following this minor blowup, the Commission of Fine Arts and the management of Rock Creek Park appear to have maintained a more cordial relationship, as no further controversies erupted during the remainder of the engineer's administration of the park. When the National Park Service assumed control of Rock Creek Park in 1933, however, Sherrill's office would not fare well in the several reports made to assess the park's condition and recommend future management policies.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Greenleaf to Sherrill, 3 March 1922; Moore to Ridley, 22 May 1920, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52; Entry 17, Commission Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

¹¹¹ Sherrill to Greenleaf, 10 March 1922, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52; Entry 17, Commission Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

¹¹² Greenleaf to Sherrill, 11 March 1922; Greenleaf to Moore, 6 February 1919, Rock Creek Park, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52; Entry 17, Commission Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

Road Construction in Rock Creek Park, 1919-1933

The first major road construction in Rock Creek Park under the administration of the OPB&G was the access road from Chevy Chase to Beach Drive that had been suggested by the Rock Creek Park Board of Control and endorsed by the Olmsted Brothers report. In April 1919 Ridley began consultation with the Army Corps of Engineers and his landscape architecture advisory board of Payne and Langdon to devise a suitable connection. The location of the lower part of the roadway was fairly self-evident, following a tributary stream valley that intersected with Rock Creek approximately one-quarter mile north of Milk House Ford. Deciding on the best place for the driveway to link up with Daniel Road was more problematic. The original Board of Control proposal had envisioned a direct connection with Rittenhouse Street, which was a fairly major east-west road extending to the D.C. boundary at Western Avenue near Chevy Chase Circle. The Olmsted plan portrayed two potential park entrances in this vicinity, one from Rittenhouse Street and another a bit farther south at Patterson Street. The Patterson Street entrance would connect with the circuit drive that traced a sinuous course along the west side of the park, which also intersected with the road along the narrow stream valley from Beach Drive to Rittenhouse Street. Ridley decided to develop both of these entrances in slightly modified form. The Olmsted report's proposals for extended circuit drives were discarded, leaving the segment from the Rittenhouse Street access via Fort DeRussy to Military Road. Only the short connection between the main access drive and Patterson was to be constructed immediately (the rest of the proposed drive was never completed). Both outlets onto Daniel Road were slightly shifted from the rigid grid of the city's street plan to conform better with the local topography. These changes were made in close consultation with Payne and Langdon, who performed exactly the function for which they were engaged by refining Olmsted's generalizations and the engineer's technically feasible plans with subtle adjustments designed to preserve and enhance the park's scenery while also providing the necessary means of access. Langdon and Payne also appeared to be more attuned to safety and circulation concerns than Ridley. Since Rittenhouse Street intersected with Daniel Road at the bottom of the ravine, where traffic had a tendency to speed up rather than slow down, as would be preferable for an intersection, Langdon and Payne advised that the entrance be moved to a safer location about 400' north. For similar reasons, they recommended the Patterson Street entrance be moved slightly south to the crest of a small rise offering better visibility in both directions. Separating the entrances more widely in this fashion, they observed, would serve a broader territory and provide a more equitable distribution of traffic. Langdon and Payne outlined a number of subtle adjustments aimed at minimizing damage to the existing scenery, revealing scenic features to better advantage, and producing longer, smoother curves and grades that would provide a safer and more pleasurable driving experience. Shifting the Rittenhouse connection out of the creek bottom to higher ground would not only result in a safer intersection, it would "save slashing into a beautiful rolling hillside whose graceful sides are typical of old valleys" while preserving "a charming open dell fringed by trees and favored by a meandering stream of clear, rippling water whose shimmering surface is seen through frequent vistas from the proposed road." The original route would also have required the construction of an unsightly 8'- deep fill to bring the park drive up to the level of Daniel Road. This minute attention to scenic effects had not been articulated in earlier

discussions of road-building in the park. Beach had received considerable praise from some quarters for his original layout of the creek side drive, but there is no record of his directing park forces to attempt anything so esoteric as to observe the "Lamarckian line of beauty" as Payne and Langdon did in their memorandums to Ridley. The two landscape architects made repeated trips to the proposed construction site, recommending further refinements to the plans and preparing specific instructions not only about which trees should be cut (only those marked with an axe blaze) but how they should be felled ("so as to avoid unnecessary injury to the permanent trees outside the road area"). The downed trees were to be cut up and saved to be used in the construction of guard rails and rustic furniture for the park. They also recommended that the topsoil stripped off to construct the roadways be preserved and used in the landscaping of Meridian Hill Park. Similar adjustments were made to the proposed driveway leading to Patterson Street, where the entrance was shifted again to preserve a stand of five large tulip trees. The road alignment was adjusted to avoid filling in a ravine and provide smoother, more flowing curves, which would be both safer and more attractive. Ridley decided to postpone the final decisions on the intersections with Daniel Road, in part because the District of Columbia had not completed its plans for constructing streets in the adjoining section of Chevy Chase. Construction on the lower portion of the roadway could begin while the exact locations of the outlets were being determined. Adopting Payne and Langdon's general suggestions, Ridley advised that the typical section provided in the Olmsted Brothers report serve as the basic guideline for grading and constructing the road. Ridley recommended the use of an asphalt surface that would stand up to automobile traffic better than the traditional oil- and water-bound macadam pavement previously employed throughout the park. Preliminary clearing and grading for the lower portion of the roadway was begun in late May 1919. It was decided to proceed with the Patterson Street branch first. The roadway was cleared and the center-line staked from Beach Drive to Daniel Road by July 15, 1919. The more direct route to Rittenhouse Road was not constructed until 1935, but the winding lane to Patterson Street was soon completed. The roadway was named "Bingham Drive" in honor of Col. Theodore A. Bingham, who served as Officer in Charge of the Public Buildings and Grounds from 1897-1903.¹¹³

Before it was absorbed into the newly formed Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital (OPB&PP) in 1925, the OPB&G constructed another access road on the east side of Rock Creek Park, along with a number of modest bridges and other minor improvements. Designated Sherrill Drive, the new park entrance led from Aspen Street, just south of Walter Reed Hospital, to Beach Drive. Begun in 1924, it was completed in 1925. The

¹¹³ Letter, Ridley to Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, 1 April 1919; memorandum, Payne and Langdon to Ridley, 2 April 1919; memorandum, Payne and Langdon to Ridley, 10 April 1919; memorandum, Payne and Langdon to Ridley, 19 April 1919; memorandum, Payne and Langdon to Ridley, 1 May 1919; letter, Ridley to Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, 30 April 1919; memorandum, Ridley to Rock Creek Park Advisory Board, 17 May 1919; memorandum from Rock Creek Park Superintendent Gillen to Ridley, 15 July 1919, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives.

macadam-surfaced Sherrill Drive wound in a rather tight arc around a minor promontory and then down a small ravine, intersecting with Beach Drive in a flat, open section of the creek valley that was well-suited to picnic ground development. Sherrill Drive crossed Rock Creek on a small, Warren-type steel truss bridge that had been acquired from the War Department as surplus. Completed in 1924, the Sherrill Drive Bridge was not up to the aesthetic standards of other park bridges, despite the use of native stone abutments in a vain attempt to harmonize the steel superstructure with the park landscape. A 1935 newspaper article on Rock Creek's bridges characterized the Sherrill Drive Bridge as "really unsightly" and expressed hope that the steel trusses would be encased in concrete or otherwise made "presentable."¹¹⁴ In 1921 the OPB&G renovated the 1895 Peirce Mill Bridge, which was a basic steel girder structure that had been somewhat more successfully rusticized with wood railings and masonry abutments and wingwalls. The OPB&G added tubular steel railings and surfaced the wood deck with asphalt, realigning the approach road at the same time for increased safety. This bridge made no great aesthetic contribution to the park, but it remained a fixture for decades, finally being renovated in the 1990s.¹¹⁵

The OPB&PP made a number of improvements to the road system of Rock Creek Park during its seven-year administration from 1926-1932. The two biggest road projects within the park during this period were the construction of a new road to provide access to the golf course from Sixteenth Street and the continuation of Beach Drive along Rock Creek to the District line to link up with the Rock Creek Park extension being developed by the Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission (M-NCPC). The first section of roadway, winding from Underwood Street to the golf course clubhouse, was completed in 1926. The next year, a new driveway was constructed from the clubhouse south to Military Road, replacing an old gravel road that was more level and direct, but crossed several of the course's fairways. The new roadway cut back sharply toward the east boundary of the park and then descended to Military Road via a small ravine. This route required a considerable amount of sidehill excavation, with cuts of up to 20' and fills of 15'. Park forces also constructed a log bridge with a 40' span and native stone abutments and wingwalls. The hand-hewn timbers for this rustic structure came from trees within the park.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ "Ever Try Bridge Hunting in Rock Creek?" Washington Evening Star, 20 October 1935.

¹¹⁵ Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . . in the District of Columbia, Extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1925 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), 1942-3; Bushong, 110-11.

¹¹⁶ Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1926 (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1926), 24-25; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1927, 34-35; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1928, 26-29, plates 12-15.

The continuation of Beach Drive to provide a direct connection to the Maryland extension of Rock Creek Park was surveyed in spring 1931 and completed in June 1932. Before this segment was constructed, the section of Beach Drive leading to Kalmia Road provided the park's primary northern outlet. The new three-quarter mile long roadway wound along the southwest bank of Rock Creek from the bridge leading to Kalmia Road to the District line, where it connected with the park drive already constructed by the M-NCPC. This part of Rock Creek had previously been accessible only by foot and bridle paths. While the ground was generally more level and open in this area than in the south part of Rock Creek Valley, and the driveway was laid out to follow existing contours as much as possible, constructing the road through this long-undeveloped area still required considerable excavation. Numerous large trees were either cut down or transplanted. Completion of this segment enabled motorists to drive along Rock Creek all the way from the National Zoo into Maryland. The Maryland section of the park road system provided an intersection with East-West Highway, the primary route between Bethesda and Silver Spring. These links to the rapidly growing suburbs of Montgomery County helped fuel the transformation of Beach Drive from an isolated park drive into a busy commuter thoroughfare playing an increasingly prominent role in the transportation system of the Washington metropolitan area.¹¹⁷

Other road improvements completed during by the OPB&PP between 1926-1932 included the construction of brick or stone gutters in many locations to improve drainage, the replacement of most of the wood guard rails throughout the park and the installation of many additional stretches of post-and-rail in sections that had proved problematic, the resurfacing of much of the park road mileage, and some minor widening and realignment to improve the safety of tight curves on Beach Drive, Morrow Drive, and Ridge Road. The Milk House and Blagden Avenue fords were repaved in 1926. A bridge was built across Rock Creek near Milk House Ford at this time to facilitate all-weather travel through the park. Traffic on Beach Drive had the option of using the ford or following new, asphalt-paved approach roads over the new bridge. Four new foot bridges and one bridle path bridge were constructed and a comfort station was constructed near the intersection of Beach Drive and Morrow Road. The D.C. Highway Department built a new bridge on Military Road in 1929. Reflecting its status as a public highway bridge rather than a park structure, the Military Road Bridge was a steel and concrete flat-arch span with neoclassical detailing including a cast-concrete balustraded parapet. In 1934, a National Park Service landscape architect condemned this "poorly designed, poorly located bridge with its unnecessarily heavy concreted beams, its clumsy parapet and generally uninspired design."¹¹⁸ When Military Road was realigned in the 1960s, this stretch of roadway was

¹¹⁷ "Rock Creek Park Expansion Work Will Start Soon," Washington Evening Star, 10 April 1931; "New Driveway Ready Soon," Washington Evening Star, 23 June 1932.

¹¹⁸ Malcom Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" unpublished report ca. 1934, Rock Creek Park project file, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52, Record Group 66, National Archives, 15.

redesignated Joyce Road and the 1929 bridge became known as the Old Military Road Bridge.¹¹⁹

The tremendous growth in automobile ownership during the 1920s had a significant impact on Rock Creek Park. Reflecting nationwide trends, automobile registration in the District of Columbia increased more than 100 percent between 1920 and 1924, doubling again by the early 1930s.¹²⁰ As early as 1924, Sherrill described the continued expansion of Rock Creek Park's road system as a necessary response to "the constantly increasing number of automobilists."¹²¹ The expansion and improvement of the park's road system was undoubtedly popular with Washington motorists, but complaints about the negative impact of automobiles in the park began to appear by the early 1920s. The construction of Bingham Drive and proposals for additional road-building prompted local resident Ewing Summers to write an irate letter to the Washington Herald. Complaining that "The original picturesque wildness so greatly admired by all scientific naturalists of earlier times is already half-ruined by automobile drives and clearings," Summers protested, "Now it is proposed that what little is left shall be completely destroyed by the invasion of automobile roads." Summers also objected to the creation of Rock Creek golf course, lamenting that the picturesque beauties of the park were to be transformed into "a monotonous park like our Mall." Recasting Maryland statesman Charles Pinckney's famous phrase "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute," Summers asserted that the current park management policy appeared to be "Millions for automobile drives, but not once cent for footpaths for naturalists along our small watercourses." Summers claimed his protest against further "encroachments" encapsulated the sentiments of "the many thousands of Washington people who take more delight in the original wilds than in anything else."¹²² Summers also wrote directly to Sherrill, expressing his concerns in equally vivid form. "I don't know who originated the project of so occupying every nook and corner of the wild forest with the omnipresent noise and stench of automobiles that natural-history strollers, scientists, and nearly all professional people cannot get away from them!" he admonished. Softening slightly,

¹¹⁹ Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1926 (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1926), 24-25; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1927, 34-35; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1928, 26-29, plates 14-15; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1929, 34-35, plates 15-16; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1930, 45-47; Bushing 109-12.

¹²⁰ District of Columbia Department of Highways, "Twenty-four years of Progress in Highway Development, 1924-1948," (Department of Highways, Washington, D.C., 1948), 39-47. Another measure of the changing relationship between the park and the automobile was that in 1924, more than 60 percent of cars registered in the District were open touring models, which fostered a more immediate relationship with nature than the closed coupes and sedans that became the dominant automobile design by the late 1920s.

¹²¹ Sherrill, "National Capital Needs," Parks and Recreation 8 (November-December 1924): 66.

¹²² "Wants Wild Woods Saved," letter to the editor from Ewing Summers, Washington Herald, 27 June 1921.

he concluded, "Probably you did not; but I hope you will kindly forward these communications to the responsible party if you know who he is, and oblige thousands."¹²³

Sherrill immediately sent a solicitous reply, suggesting that the two shared a distaste for "the vile odor that emanates from automobiles" and assuring Summers that he was fully sympathetic with the need to reserve large areas of the park for the enjoyment of non-motorized explorers. Sherrill insisted that the proposed improvements would not compromise the integrity of the park. To the contrary, they would advance the long-standing policy of making the park's scenery accessible to a broader range of people. More roads were needed, Sherrill maintained, to open up undeveloped sections of the park that remained "unavailable to more than a very small number of persons interested in pioneering work." Sherrill promised that even when the current program of improvements was completed, there would still be large areas without motor roads in which the "limited few" could indulge their wilderness fancies. Personalizing the congressional mandate for the park's operation, Sherrill assured Summers, "Any effort to destroy the natural beauty of Rock Creek Park will be most strenuously opposed by me and my only desire is to make it more readily available to the people who are eager to enjoy its beauties." Sherrill invited Summers to drop by and discuss his concerns in person, if he still felt the need. Unsatisfied by this response, Summers returned Sherrill's letter, along with a curt note admonishing "The more 'inaccessible' any wild spot in the 'wild'erness is the more 'wildly' will the rambles, the lovers of 'wild' nature, 'scramble for it.' That's their chief delight."¹²⁴

As automobile ownership became a more widespread phenomenon, the management of Rock Creek Park was increasingly called upon to deal with motorists who failed to exhibit the genteel sensibilities of their more socially refined forbears. The growing number of automobiles in the park also turned practices that had formerly been minor nuisances or even amusements into serious management problems and safety hazards. In December 1920, park forces found it necessary to place boulders at the entrance of the bridle path leading from Daniel Road to Fort DeRussey because motorists were illegally using the path to drive up to the ruins of the old fort and hold drunken parties.¹²⁵

¹²³ Summers to Sherrill, 7 July 1921, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives.

¹²⁴ Sherrill to Summers 8 July 1921; Summers to Sherrill, 12 July 1921, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives.

¹²⁵ Letter, Major A. J. Johnson, Corps of Engineers to Ridley, 3 December 1920, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives.

Another problem stemming from the growth of automobile traffic and the increasingly discourteous behavior of motorists was the parking of vehicles on the main driveways. One or two vehicles stopped on the side of the narrow park roads posed enough of an inconvenience, but by the summer of 1920, influential park visitors were complaining that the roads in the vicinity of prime picnicking areas like Peirce Mill were cluttered with parked automobiles, making it difficult, if not impossible to pass. When the roadways were thus blocked, some motorists attempted to get through by leaving the main track and driving over the park land, tearing up the scenery and frequently getting stuck in the process. Ridley attempted to alleviate this problem by instructing the park police to inaugurate a one-way traffic policy on Sundays and holidays for the stretch of roadway on the east side of Rock Creek between Peirce Mill and the Broad Branch Bridge, reserving one lane for parked autos. Rotating sign boards were placed at either end of this stretch. One side designated one-way traffic and was displayed on Sundays and holidays; the other side was blank for two-way weekday traffic. This expedient apparently worked fairly well, though local boys soon learned to manipulate the rotating signs to confuse motorists. New one-way traffic signs were produced that could be erected and taken down by park police on the designated days.¹²⁶

Despite Sherrill's populist protestations, he alienated a significant segment of the local citizenry by issuing a ban on a popular practice that had grown to problematic proportions with the spread of automobile ownership and the expansion of road facilities in the park. Prior to the widespread adoption of air-conditioning, one of the chief arguments in favor of parks was that they provided oases of cool, fresh air, where urban residents could go to escape the summer heat. The hot, sultry climate of Washington made this function even more important than in most cities, a fact that the Senate Park Commission observed when it presented its recommendations for improving the city's park system. The cool air that settled in the valley of Rock Creek made the park particularly attractive as a place to escape the oppressive heat of Washington summers. Local motorists soon discovered the appeal of driving into the park at the end of the day and pulling into the picnic grounds or other parking areas to spend the night. The proliferation of fold-out beds and other devices for car-camping in the early 1920s made the conversion from touring car to outdoor bedroom relatively simple, though many people undoubtedly made do with regular car seats and other makeshift expedients. Others just drove into the park in the evening to enjoy several hours of cool respite. According to the Washington Herald, it was not uncommon to find 500 vehicles parked along the roadways in Rock Creek Park on a hot summer night. Most of these vehicles would likely have belonged to working or middle-class residents, who could afford an automobile, but not a home, in the cool, leafy suburbs of northwest Washington. Residents of the expensive suburbs in the hills surrounding Rock Creek Park had no need to resort to such undignified measures. Many of Washington's more privileged citizens

¹²⁶ Letters, Arthur Dunn, President, American Press Association to Ridley, 2 July 1920 and 10 September 1920; letter, Ridley to Dunn, 7 September 1920; memorandum, Lieut. P. J. Carroll, U.S. Park Police to Ridley, 15 September 1920.

undoubtedly found the practice distasteful, unattractive, and more than a little threatening, as it was difficult to discern who the occupants of these cars were, where they came from, and what they might be doing. Unless human habits have changed over the last seventy-five years, it is likely that these overnight visitors did not always leave the woods and roadsides in pristine condition. Park officials had opposed the idea of establishing an official tourist camp in Rock Creek Park and they were not inclined to sit by and watch the park be transformed into an ad hoc campground, either by local residents or long-distance travelers. In June 1922, Sherrill announced a prohibition of overnight parking in Rock Creek Park. Sherrill expressed both practical and moral justifications for banning overnight parking in the park. Asserting that the primary intention of this new regulation was "to protect the law-abiding public from nuisance and young girls from waywardness," he advised, "It is the parties of young men and women, giving no thought of the beauties of the park, and who remain parked, sometimes without lights at midnight, whom we will remind of this regulation." When the public announcement of this order elicited a storm of protests, Sherrill relented and agreed to let families sleep in the park unmolested, instructing the park police to target the rule's enforcement that "persons parking at late hours of the night and early hours of the morning for immoral purposes."¹²⁷

A few years later, objections to the popular practice of using the fords in Rock Creek as convenient spot for washing automobiles revealed a similar conflict between vernacular practices and elitist-tinged proto-environmentalist sensibilities. Motorists had long been permitted to wash their cars in the creek, provided they took care not to obstruct traffic in the process. Like parking in the creek valley to escape the city's heat, car washing in Rock Creek was a practical solution for people of moderate means. Wealthy car owners could either pay someone to wash their vehicles or had the facilities to do it themselves, unlike the occupants of inner city tenements and row houses. The practice apparently elicited little comment when it was confined to isolated instances, but, like the parking issue, it became increasingly problematic with the rapid rise in automobile ownership during the 1920s-1930s. In July 1936, Russell T. Edward of the American Nature Association sent an irate letter to the Washington Post complaining that Rock Creek Park had become "an outdoor garage for the Washington automobile industry." While Edward's objections may have been rooted in genuine concern for the scenic and environmental impact of car-washing in the creek, his protest took on a decidedly elitist tone that belittled the moral and social standing of those who stooped to washing vehicles in public. "With a background of still reflecting waters with ducks and geese paddling idly about," he fumed, "You will find women in Mother Hubbards or nightgowns, I wouldn't know which, washing automobiles aided by, I presume, their husbands, stripped to the shirt or less." Secretary of the

¹²⁷ The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia, 76; "Parking in Rock Creek Park," [editorial Washington Herald, 14 June 1922; Sherrill quoted in "Night Parking Prohibition Rule in Rock Creek Exempts Families," Washington Evening Star 18 July 1922; "The Park Rule Modified" Washington Evening Star, 11 July 1922.

Interior Harold Ickes agreed that this sort of behavior was unacceptable, and promised to personally see that park regulations were changed to prohibit car washing in Rock Creek.¹²⁸ Another social concern that was brought into starker relief by the spread of automobile ownership was the segregation issue. In 1921 Sherrill ordered that signs be manufactured to designate separate "white" and "colored" picnic grounds. These picnic areas were to be apportioned "in proportion to the use being made of the park by these two classes of people." This policy was temporarily forestalled by Rep. Martin B. Madden, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, but OPB&PP executive director U. S. Grant III reinstituted the segregation order after Madden's death in 1928.¹²⁹

If the rapid growth in automobile ownership exacerbated social tensions and began to have increasingly noticeable effects on park scenery and natural resources, it had an even greater impact on the physical condition of the park's roads. The heavy pounding of automobile traffic caused severe problems with the water-bound macadam surfaces of most of the park roads. Park forces spent much of their time and money maintaining these roads with repeated applications of gravel, ash, and light oil. Recycled crank-case oil from government vehicles was spread liberally on the park roadways to keep down the dust. In 1931, Grant appealed for funds to upgrade the park's road system to the modern standards epitomized by the newly constructed, asphalt-surfaced Bingham Drive. Grant insisted that pouring money into the maintenance of the park's outdated roadways was a losing proposition. "They were designed for carriage traffic," Grant declared, "and can not much longer stand up under the increasingly heavy motor traffic."¹³⁰ In addition to the inadequate surface, most of the park's road bed was not constructed to modern standards, with thick subgrades, underdrains, curbs, and gutters. Instead, the older roads were constructed with high crowns in the center so that water would hopefully run off into side ditches, which were often clogged and unsightly. The crown method had been acceptable during the days of sporadic carriage traffic, but was ill-suited to heavy automobile use. The high crown was unsafe for two-way motor traffic, while no amount of maintenance could keep the macadam roadways from tearing apart. The repeated oil applications had built up a 1"-2" crust of hardened, asphalt-like material, but this weak and brittle surface was no substitute for modern bituminous concrete pavement laid over a thick, well-drained subgrade. In 1930 and again in 1931, the Washington Evening Star reported Grant's dissatisfaction with the condition of the

¹²⁸ "Ickes to Forbid Washing Autos in Park Creek," Washington Post, 6 August 1936.

¹²⁹ Memorandum, Sherrill to Gillen, 14 September 1921, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, General Correspondence, 303; Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, General Correspondence, Entry 97, RG 42 National Archives; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 26.

¹³⁰ Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1930, 45-47; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1931, 42-44; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1932, 33.

roads in Rock Creek Park, reiterating Grant's observation that the existing roads had been designed for the "Horse-and-Buggy Age" and were wholly inadequate for the "Motorized Era." One of the worst problem areas, according to a 1931 Evening Star editorial, was the heavily traveled cross-park route from Park Road to Tilden Street, past the old Peirce Mill. Due to the lack of cross traffic, motorists could build up a high rate of speed on this section, but they frequently ran into problems caused by the narrow winding nature of the road, with its unbanked turns and minimal shoulders. While this road may have had been admirably suited for the days of "leisurely carriage drives . . . [when] the sharp turns and the sudden drops held no dangers for the walking horse," the newspaper observed that "the automobile has changed all this." The Evening Star asserted that the rising number of accidents on park roads demonstrated that it was time to begin rebuilding Rock Creek's road system. Grant undoubtedly welcomed this public show of support, but he was too familiar with Congress's parsimonious attitude toward Washington's park system to expect immediate relief. While the Evening Star confidently predicted "Reconstruction of the park road system is just around the corner," Grant warned that the comprehensive reconstruction of Rock Creek Park's roads would likely be a slow and frustrating process.¹³¹

The National Park Service Takes Over: Rock Creek Park in the 1930s

Grant did not have to worry about road conditions in Rock Creek Park much longer. In August 1933, the OPB&PP was abolished and Rock Creek Park became part of the newly formed National Capital Parks component of the National Park System. This change of management was part of a sweeping reorganization of federal lands that placed a number of disparate units formerly controlled by separate government agencies under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Along with the OPB&PP, the new National Park Service responsibilities included the national monuments, formerly administered by the U.S. Forest Service, and the national battlefield parks, previously administered by the War Department.¹³² When the park service assumed control of Rock Creek Park, it assigned landscape architect Malcolm Kirkpatrick and plant pathologist E. P. Meinecke to survey the park's condition and assess the most pressing management concerns. Both men were appalled with the condition of the park's road system, woodlands, streams, and structures, which they attributed to poor management, inadequate appropriations, and confusion caused by the park's status as a combination urban park and nature reserve, along with an inability to develop a proper relationship between automobile use and other park values. Meinecke and Kirkpatrick related their findings in two unpublished reports prepared for National Park Service Branch of Plans and Designs Chief

¹³¹ "Rebuilding of Old Rock Creek Park Roads Found Necessary," Washington Evening Star 15 October 1930; "The Weakest Link," [editorial], Washington Evening Star, 26 December 1931.

¹³² National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, [Barry Mackintosh], The National Parks: Shaping the System (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 24-34.

Thomas Vint in 1934.¹³³

Meinecke's remarks were confined primarily to technical landscape improvement matters, but his general comments underscored the cumulative results of the haphazard manner in which the park had been allowed to develop. "The strongest impression I get is that of disappointment," Meinecke informed Vint. "I have every reason to expect, in a large city, the capital of the Nation, a park representing that which is best in American landscape art, designed to serve a large and growing number of its inhabitants as a place of recreation and refuge from the turmoil and heat of the city," he continued. "I find instead a curious mixture of more or less futile attempts at landscaping and at wild or rather unkempt growth, haphazardly developed, of amateurish attempts at embellishment side by side with crudest neglect." Meinecke was also troubled by the hodge-podge of public thoroughfares and park drives, and by the lack of any attempt to segregate recreational traffic from motorists using the park as a short cut from one part of town to the other.¹³⁴

The jarring contrast of park drives and public thoroughfares compounded the impression that, despite the elaborate recommendations of the Olmsted Brothers report, Rock Creek Park had continued to evolve with no comprehensive development strategy and minimal evidence of professional landscape management. Pointing out the effects of this haphazard development on the motorist's experience, Meinecke observed, "One drives along on a winding road, beginning to enjoy the feel of pleasant woodland and is suddenly stopped by a speed road. Again, a long drive between dense forest walls makes one hope for a change, but in turning a corner one is disappointed in seeing a meadow in a stream bottom being rapidly occupied by ragged and unfriendly second growth of little promise."¹³⁵

Meinecke acknowledged the challenge of managing an essentially natural park in an intensively utilized urban situation, but he insisted that the inherent difficulties of the task demanded more attention to maximizing the scenic potential of the park's "natural" scenery through artistic and scientific landscape management, not less. The previous administrations, Meinecke implied, had been content to sit back and let nature take its course, without recognizing that attractive park scenery was rarely the product of natural forces alone, especially when a landscape had been modified by intensive human use, as was the case with much of Rock Creek Park. Areas of beautiful scenery did occur throughout the park, but more could be developed through intelligent landscape improvement policies, which would also help preserve

¹³³ E. P. Meinecke, "Memorandum for Mr. Vint, re: Rock Creek Park, 20 June 1934,"; Malcom Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" unpublished report ca. 1934, both in Rock Creek Park project file, Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, 1910-52, Record Group 66, National Archives.

¹³⁴ Meinecke, "Memorandum for Mr. Vint, re: Rock Creek Park."

¹³⁵ Meinecke, "Memorandum for Mr. Vint, re: Rock Creek Park."

and restore existing scenic sections that were rapidly deteriorating due to the unchecked growth of undesirable vegetation. Minimalistic management policies might be sufficient in larger state, county, or national parks, he declared, but Rock Creek Park was too small, too heavily used, and too threatened by incompatible, space-sapping developments to allow scenic potential to go to waste in large amounts of second-rate woodlands. Meinecke pointed out that there was "already enough waste with the many roads leading through the park which are nothing but high-speed thoroughfares leading from city street to city street and which have nothing to do with the main object of the park, namely recreation." One of the prime examples of the sacrifice of recreational appeal and basic resource management principles was the major roadway construction project just beginning along Piney Branch. Asserting that "Piney Branch is now in a sad condition," Meinecke observed, "The new road has narrowed the stream bed to such an extent that the flood waters from heavy rains above are forced into a small bed." The inevitable results would be that the accelerated run-off into this narrowed stream would cut into the banks, causing unsightly erosion. The same problem was also occurring in numerous sections of Rock Creek itself, which alternated between a dry creek bed and an overflowing storm sewer, undercutting banks, depositing silt, and damaging creek-side vegetation during periodic floods. Meinecke labeled previous attempts to stabilize the streambanks as "utterly inadequate and curiously crude in execution."¹³⁶

Kirkpatrick echoed many of Meinecke's criticisms of the previous administration's inattention to basic landscape management and park development principles. Like Meinecke, he pointed to the deterioration of the park woodlands, the problem of unchecked weed-tree growth choking out more desirable species, and the failure to remove dead timber. These three concerns had played a prominent role in the 1918 Olmsted Report and the Commission of Fine Arts' supporting comments, but park management forces had apparently been lax in carrying out these recommendations. Citing the continuing value of the Olmsted Brothers report as a statement of fundamental management principles, Kirkpatrick offered his comments as a supplement to the 1918 document, taking into account key concerns that had occurred in the interim. The most notable of these developments, of course, was the rapid proliferation of automobile traffic. "The automobile," Kirkpatrick declared, "can be designated as one of the greatest detriments to the enjoyment of Rock Creek Park today." While Olmsted had viewed the automobile as an extension of the horse-and-carriage that could be integrated into Rock Creek Park in a harmonious fashion by doubling or tripling the number of pleasure drives, Kirkpatrick recognized that motoring had changed over the intervening fifteen years. Earlier automobile owners may have enjoyed testing their machines along the tortuous roads and quaint fords of Rock Creek Park, but by the 1930s, motorists wanted to go further and faster, enjoying the wider, straighter, smoother surfaces of modern parkways like the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, newly completed on the other side of the Potomac River. Not only were these modern parkways longer, safer and faster, but also their scenery was designed in broader strokes for better viewing

¹³⁶ Meinecke, "Memorandum for Mr. Vint, re: Rock Creek Park."

at higher speeds. They generally contained well-developed recreational facilities serviced by ample and well-paved parking areas, which, with the exception of the golf course and tennis courts along Sixteenth Street, were not available in Rock Creek Park. Recognizing the changing requirements of recreational motorways, Kirkpatrick observed, "It is very unlikely that any competent person selecting land for the construction of a modern roadway, adequate for the pleasure driving needs of an urban area, would regard Rock Creek Valley as preferable to other possibilities."¹³⁷

While Kirkpatrick believed the road system in Rock Creek Park could not and should not be radically transformed along the lines of contemporary parkway development, he recommended a number of measures that could help make the park more attractive and efficient for recreational motorists. Constructing additional major driveways was probably not a reasonable option, Kirkpatrick concluded, since building more roadways would cut the park's undeveloped areas into increasingly smaller and less satisfying units. In most areas of the park, moreover, constructing roadways consistent with modern design standards would result in unacceptable damage to existing landscape values. If additional roadways had to be built, he advised, they should be carefully planned in conjunction with existing roadways to provide a circuit that could be made to carry the maximum number of vehicles through the institution of one-way traffic regulation. As a general principle, Kirkpatrick believed it was better to undertake minor improvements to the existing road system aimed at improving circulation and otherwise accommodating motorists rather than to sacrifice undeveloped areas to construct new roadways. One way to achieve this goal was to straighten out the alignments of some of the park's old carriage roads, which forced motorists to drive at extremely low speeds by 1930s standards. Kirkpatrick advocated a conservative approach to road development within Rock Creek Park, but he had no intention of excluding motorists altogether and was not squeamish about recommending basic improvements to the park's main pleasure drives. "A proper park development," he insisted, "cannot preclude the possibility of, but must go hand and hand with, comfortable and safe driving." Where roadways were deemed necessary, Kirkpatrick insisted, they should be adequate to the needs of modern motorists. "In road relocation, landscape features cannot all be held sacred," he declared. "Their importance cannot eclipse that of the requirements of the motorist." Kirkpatrick assured that he was not calling for "a sweeping program of realignment," but for finely tuned adjustments in certain acknowledged problem areas.¹³⁸

The historic fords in Rock Creek Park constituted major impediments to efficient traffic circulation. Though beloved by many park visitors, they were conspicuous sources of congestion, as vehicles slowed to a crawl to pass through them, stopped suddenly to contemplate

¹³⁷ Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" 1, 10.

¹³⁸ Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" 11-13.

the final plunge, or simply came to a halt to enjoy the sensation of sitting in mid-stream. In periods of high water, moreover, the fords were impassable, turning through-roads into dead ends and impeding access to and through key areas of the park. Kirkpatrick advised that the remaining fords be retained as "interesting landmarks," but advised that they all be supplemented by bridges to ensure all-weather passage. He also recommended that the fords be closed during periods of heavy traffic to eliminate tie-ups caused by hesitant motorists. The new bridges, Kirkpatrick advised, should be constructed in a simple harmonious fashion, avoiding both the inappropriate formality of the incongruous Old Military Road Bridge and the excessively "picturesque" quality of some of the park's earlier structures. Kirkpatrick singled out the existing park signs as the most conspicuous examples of the unfortunate tendency for park designers to go overboard in trying to make park structures emulate organic forms. Condemning the signs as "'rustic' in the worst sense of that word which implies apparently that to conform to natural surroundings, objects of wood must ape the growing tree," Kirkpatrick declared this practice "an absurd notion that yields absurd results." Contemporary photographs show a variety of sign types. The format that seems to have incited Kirkpatrick's ire consisted of white boards framed with narrow branches. Some were suspended from peeled wood posts on triangular frames comprised of similarly slim, peeled tree-branches; others were tacked on to conveniently located trees; in both cases, the "twiggy" rusticity was closer to Victorian eclectic sensibilities and camp craft projects than to the more robust and substantial rustic look favored by contemporary NPS designers.¹³⁹ Kirkpatrick also criticized the park's wood guard rails as below National Park Service standards and condemned the use of regularly placed individual stones in lieu of guard walls or guard rails as "one of the most deplorable practices in roadside treatment."¹⁴⁰ He advised that these roadside features be brought up to National Park Service standards and suggested that the existing "drab and uninteresting" collection of toilet buildings and shelters be improved in a similar fashion.¹⁴¹

Kirkpatrick also suggested that the attractiveness and efficiency of the park drives could be improved by the development of better parking facilities. With minimal provision for off-road parking, motorists continued to stop in more or less random fashion along the park roads. Kirkpatrick pointed out that this practice was unsightly, inefficient, and unsafe. Not only were parked cars eyesores and traffic hazards, the lack of parking facilities exacerbated the

¹³⁹ For comparison, see U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Planning, Park Structures and Facilities (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935).

¹⁴⁰ Contemporary photographs depict a variety of guard rail types. The predominant type consisted of a single substantial log rail spiked to sturdy log posts. In some locations the log rail was split or hewn, while in others the rail was fully rounded. A white-painted double-board and post guard rail flanked Sherrill Drive at the junction of Sixteenth Street. Sections of Klinge Road were protected by two strands of steel cable strung between white-painted concrete posts.

¹⁴¹ Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" 14-15.

dependence on automobiles by restricting the ability of people to drive into the park, leave their vehicles, and engage in other activities such as hiking and picnicking. Kirkpatrick advised that parking areas be built near popular picnicking spots and recreational facilities. The new parking lots would ideally be located at a distance from the main park drives and screened from view with suitable plantings. He proposed that some of the new parking areas be combined with scenic overlooks, suggesting that the heights reached by Ross Drive and Wise Road offered ideal opportunities for this type of development and advising that "judicious clearing would open dramatic shots to the valley below." Attractively developed scenic turnouts would help control and discipline motorists by encouraging them to park in a limited number of well-prepared spots rather than stop at random along the roadside. Drawing on the National Park Service's experience in the western parks, he counseled, "Giving areas for the enjoyment of definite vistas would lessen any tendency to park on the edge of these narrow curving roads, and afford better enjoyment of scenic features than can be had from a moving car." Kirkpatrick also thought it would be a good idea to spread picnic areas more broadly throughout the park. The existing facilities were concentrated along the creek bottom. While Kirkpatrick acknowledged that Rock Creek was unquestionably the park's foremost scenic attraction, he countered, "it can be said with equal certainty that the proximity of the more important park drives, with their heavy burdens of Sunday traffic, affords little of the quiet and repose that any picnic party might properly be seeking." The picnic grounds and associated parking facilities also detracted from the enjoyment of the creek scenery by passing motorists. New picnic grounds, he advised, should be developed along more remote sections of the park road system and screened, as much as possible through judicious design and plantings.¹⁴²

While the rise in recreational motoring created numerous problems, Kirkpatrick recognized that utilitarian traffic posed the biggest threat to Rock Creek Park. Much of the growth in traffic in Rock Creek Park was due not to recreational motoring, but to the growing tendency of motorists to use the park drives for practical purposes, either to cross the park where no other options existed or to use Beach Drive to avoid the congestion of city streets. Beach Drive, with its outlets to the city's prosperous northwest suburbs, provided an increasingly attractive alternative to the stop-and-go traffic of heavily used thoroughfares such as Connecticut Avenue and Sixteenth Street. Beach Drive's utility as a commuter route would increase immeasurably with the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. By connecting Rock Creek Park and the Mall with a modern, four-lane motorway, the new parkway would enable motorists to drive all the way from the Maryland line to the heart of the city without encountering a traffic signal. While Kirkpatrick viewed the parkway's impact on Rock Creek Park with trepidation, regional traffic planners awaited the parkway's completion with undisguised glee. Recognizing that there would soon be pressure to "improve" Beach Drive to accommodate the additional traffic generated by the parkway, Kirkpatrick insisted that "high standard roadway development for the entire length of the valley cannot be justified."

¹⁴² Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" 12.

Kirkpatrick acknowledged that something would have to be done to accommodate the inevitable traffic increase. Rather than destroy the last vestiges of scenery along Rock Creek by widening Beach Drive once again, he suggested that, if worse came to worse, it might be possible to widen the lower section of the drive through the long-developed section between Klinge Road and Broad Branch, and then channel the main flow of traffic up Broad Branch Road and along the west side of Rock Creek Park into Maryland. For the time being, however, Kirkpatrick clearly viewed cross-park traffic as the primary threat to Rock Creek Park. He appeared resigned to the eventual construction of one or more of the major cross-park thoroughfares outlined in the Olmsted Report or proposed more recently by the D.C. highway department and the National Capital Park and Planning Commission.¹⁴³ Kirkpatrick was skeptical that any of the expensive schemes then under consideration would be completed any time soon, however, and advocated the construction of grade separation structures on major cross-routes in order to minimize conflicts between ordinary city traffic crossing the park at high speeds and recreational motorists using the park drives. Even if the proposed east-west viaducts were constructed, Kirkpatrick maintained, the grade separation structures would ultimately be necessary, given "the amazing growth in motor traffic, [and] the decreasing cost and increasing efficiency of motor cars."¹⁴⁴

The cross-park thoroughfare issue continued to resurface throughout the 1930s. Rejecting the proposal for high-level bridges as too expensive, in 1937 Congress considered appropriating money for the construction of express roadways that would cross the park on enormous earthen fills. The major local precedent for this approach was the gigantic causeway constructed in 1900 to carry Massachusetts Avenue across Rock Creek. This construction had long been viewed as an unsightly aberration and the park service and D.C. authorities were looking forward to replacing it with an attractive arched bridge as part of the improvement of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the D.C. highway department strongly opposed Congress's proposal to build four similar eyesores in Rock Creek Park. The Evening Star also editorialized against the proposal, characterizing it as an act of "vandalism" that would "encroach upon the park space in terms of scores of acres, utterly destroying a large part of the forest growth, the preservation of which was one of the specific purposes of the establishment of this reservation." Not only would the proposed embankments be hideously unsightly in themselves, they would effectively partition

¹⁴³ In 1930 the National Capital Park and Planning Commission proposed the construction of four viaducts across Rock Creek Park, located approximately one-mile apart. This was a scheme that looked moderately sensible on paper, but bore little chance of success. Envisioned to be on the scale of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge, these structures would have been enormously expensive and would have significantly impacted the park's scenery. Beginning with the replacement of the outdated Calvert Street Bridge (the only part of the scheme completed), the proposal called for high-level crossing between Tilden and Upshur streets, Madison Street and Utah Ave, and the two sections of Aspen Street located opposite each other at the north end of the park ("Rock Creek Park High Level Bridge Plan Is Explained," Washington Evening Star, 2 February 1930).

¹⁴⁴ Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong With Rock Creek Park?" 10, 13-14.

one of the grandest urban parks in the world into four awkward and insubstantial minor parks, literally paving the way to more desecrations, which would be harder to prevent once the park's integrity had been so severely compromised. The Evening Star was not much fonder of the planning commission viaduct proposal, asserting, "Even bridges, however artistically designed, would intrude upon the scene destructively and in complete inharmony [sic] with the general setting." Catering to the demands of cross-park traffic in either manner would not only compromise the beauties of Rock Creek Park, it would deny motorists one of the unique advantages of living in Washington. Whether crossing above the park on embankments on viaducts, the newspaper observed, "those using such routes would deny themselves the pleasure that is now derived from passage through scenes of sylvan beauty." Opponents of the embankment plan pointed out that it was also of questionable economic and engineering merit. By concentrating on facilitating the relatively modest movement of east-west traffic, it also ignored the more pressing issue of accommodating radial traffic heading into and out of the city. If the proposed embankments were constructed, they would pose formidable obstacles to the development of a more effective radial thoroughfare. The cross-park embankment proposal was opposed by a broad coalition of planning, preservation, and transportation interests. Everyone--the National Park Service, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and the various regional transportation authorities--agreed that coming to terms with the inevitable increase in commuter traffic from downtown Washington to the northwestern suburbs was a far more pressing issue. The consensus that the volume of cross-town traffic was insufficient to justify a major loss of park scenery meant that the cross-park thoroughfare program was eventually scaled back to modest improvements to existing roadways such as Military Road and Tilden Street--at least until the construction of the Capital Beltway through the Maryland addition to Rock Creek Park several decades later. Rock Creek Park's status as a seemingly ideal avenue for radial traffic from downtown Washington to the rapidly growing northwest suburbs posed a far more contentious problem.¹⁴⁵

The National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCP&PC) addressed this issue as early as 1934, assigning its staff landscape architect, Thomas Jeffers, to prepare a report outlining potential alterations to the Rock Creek Park road system to accommodate the increase in traffic anticipated to follow the completion of the Piney Branch and Rock Creek and Potomac parkways. Like Kirkpatrick, Jeffers began his report by underscoring the importance of adhering to the 1918 Olmsted Report's insistence that the park management's primary responsibility was to ensure "the permanent preservation of its wonderful natural beauty, and the making of that beauty accessible to the people without spoiling the scenery in the process."¹⁴⁶ As was the case

¹⁴⁵ "Traffic Across Rock Creek," [editorial] Washington Evening Star, 8 April 1937; "No Need of Park Cross-Cuts," [editorial] Washington Evening Star, 9 April 1937 [quoted].

¹⁴⁶ "Olmsted Brothers Report" quoted in Thomas C. Jeffers, "Future Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge up to and Including Piney Branch Parkway," National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 16 February 1934, National Capital Park and Planning Commission minutes, 16-17 February, 1934, NCP&PC Parks and

with the broader National Park Service enabling legislation it echoed, this oft-quoted statement postulated a management strategy that, while compelling in theoretical terms, was so vague and inherently contradictory that it offered little in the way of practical guidance. By encouraging scenic preservation while insisting on ready public access, the Olmsted Report's fundamental premise was open to a wide range of interpretations on the crucial question of determining the appropriate balance between preservation and access. In the case of Rock Creek Park, the preservation versus access issue was further complicated by pressing utilitarian traffic concerns, which both Olmsted and the NPS acknowledged had considerable practical merit.

Jeffers attempted to strike a balance between these conflicting demands by dividing the park road system into several conceptual units and suggesting that these be designed and managed so that the balance between traffic concerns and scenic preservation shifted from the former to the latter as the motorist progressed along Rock Creek valley from the Potomac waterfront to the Maryland border. The completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Piney Branch Parkway, he hoped, would channel the bulk of commuter traffic out of the park and onto Connecticut Avenue and Sixteenth Street, so that the upper reaches of Beach drive could be maintained more or less in their existing condition. Completing the two parkways and accepting a modest program of traffic improvements in the intervening section of Beach Drive would reduce the pressure to upgrade the rest of the park's road system to accommodate the rapidly growing commuter population. From the mouth of Rock Creek to Cathedral Avenue, Jeffers advised, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would be ideally suited for "high speed traffic," which, by contemporary parkway standards, meant 30 to 40 mph. The curves and sight-lines in this portion of the road system were being developed with these speeds in mind, and the roadway itself would be four-lanes wide to accommodate peak commuter traffic, a significant portion of which, it was hoped, would exit via Cathedral Avenue. Jeffers proposed a two-stage transition between the "high speed" parkway south of the zoo and the narrow, winding park roads above Piney Branch. From Cathedral Avenue to Klinge Road, the main artery could be widened and straightened appreciably from existing conditions but would still be narrower than the parkway itself, with lower speeds and sharper curves in order to negotiate the steep and constricted terrain at the lower end of the National Zoo. Between Klinge Road and Piney Branch, the balance between traffic concerns and natural beauty would shift even further in favor of scenic preservation. Beach Drive could be widened slightly without serious loss of scenic values and the sharpest curves could be reduced modestly, Jeffers contended, but he insisted that any changes must be accomplished "without material damage to the landscape" so that the overall park effect would not be "sacrificed to create a wide and direct road with increased speed limit." Jeffers called for similar treatment in the development of the proposed roadway along Piney Branch. Praising the "park-like" character of the elongated reservation, he urged that its attractive topography and towering growths of tall trees "not be sacrificed for the sake of directness and increased speed." Constructing a high-speed parkway through the wider and

largely degraded lower Rock Creek valley was a logical means of combining practical traffic concerns with landscape restoration and scenic preservation, but Jeffers believed that the more intimate and undefiled scenery of Piney Branch called for a less intrusive solution. "The present attractive features should be preserved," he advised, "and the road treated as a park drive, fitting into the landscape as a subordinate part of the scenery through which it passes." Observing that the existing bridge and roadway configuration where Beach Drive crossed Piney Branch was already problematic and would be made much worse by the opening of the parkway to automobile traffic, Jeffers also recommended relocating the junction and rebuilding the original stone bridge.¹⁴⁷

While Jeffers encouraged the NCP&PC to endorse the concept of modestly retrofitting the lower portion of Beach Drive to accommodate commuter traffic, he strongly opposed the idea of transforming the upper section of Beach Drive into a high-speed commuter route. Piney Branch Parkway should act as a conduit to channel suburban traffic out of the park and onto Sixteenth Street. Above Piney Branch, Jeffers insisted, "future development should not differ in character from the development which has already taken place, namely, to preserve the natural beauty." Jeffers bolstered his recommendations against upgrading Beach Drive to accommodate current or future traffic demands by citing the Olmsted Report's assertion that the park's circulation system could not be straightened or widened significantly "without unreasonably serious injury to those very landscape beauties for the appreciation of which the roads are primarily built." Jeffers acknowledged that "a minor amount of judicious cutting back of corners might be done without any real injury," but he cautioned that such improvements should be kept to a minimum and closely scrutinized on a case by case basis. Echoing the Olmsted Report, he advised that it would be preferable to accommodate future traffic increases by constructing additional roads at the margins of the park rather than by sacrificing the unique beauties of Rock Creek by attempting to upgrade Beach Drive. Any such additional roadways should follow the natural topography and harmonize with the existing scenery and road system as much as possible, following the guidelines established in the 1918 Olmsted Report.¹⁴⁸

The NCP&PC endorsed Jeffers' recommendations in February 1934. The commission was even more vigorous than Jeffers in opposing any effort to straighten and widen Beach Drive in order to create "a direct, high speed thoroughfare to down-town Washington." The NCP&PC appeared unwilling to countenance the moderate revisions to the section between Piney Branch and Cathedral Road suggested by Jeffers. In a cover letter forwarding Jeffers' recommendations to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., NCP&PC Executive Officer (and NPS Director) Arno B.

¹⁴⁷ Jeffers, "Future Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge up to and Including Piney Branch Parkway," National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 16 February 1934.

¹⁴⁸ Jeffers, "Future Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge up to and Including Piney Branch Parkway," National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 16 February 1934.

Cammerer asserted that "By adopting the principles set forth in this report the Commission has definitely placed its stamp of disapproval on any plan to change the parklike character of Rock Creek park north of the Taft Bridge."¹⁴⁹

Olmsted praised Jeffers' report as "sound and wise," but expressed concern that the NCP&PC was overly optimistic in assuming that commuter traffic could be accommodated through the construction of Piney Branch Parkway and modest upgrades to the lower portion of Beach Drive. Once Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was completed, Olmsted warned, the park roads would rapidly become overloaded, producing enormous pressure to build a high-capacity traffic artery through Rock Creek Park and on to the rapidly growing suburbs of northwest Washington and Montgomery County, Maryland. Olmsted was particularly concerned that the inevitable congestion would produce a public outcry that would force park authorities to acquiesce to "a butcherly widening of straightening of Beach Drive." Olmsted urged the NCP&PC to explore alternatives for accommodating additional traffic without destroying the scenery along Rock Creek itself, which, he maintained, would be "irreparably sacrificed by an attempt to make Beach Drive into a high-speed parkway in extension of Rock Creek Parkway." While Olmsted staunchly opposed any alteration to the winding creek-side drive, he appeared to believe that the construction of some sort of high-speed commuter route through Rock Creek Park was desirable, or at least inevitable. Returning to an option he had originally espoused in the 1918 report, Olmsted suggested that it would be better to accommodate additional traffic by building parallel roadways along the margins of the park than by impinging on the picturesque, winding stream valley that formed "the scenic heart of the park." By constructing one or two major thoroughfares along the park's borders, Olmsted believed, park officials would be able to satisfy future traffic demands without sacrificing the most valuable portion of the park.¹⁵⁰

Despite — or, perhaps, because of — all these reports and managerial debates, there were very few significant changes to the Rock Creek Park road system during the first decade of NPS management. With the completion of the connecting parkways receiving top priority, the internal park roads got little more than routine maintenance and modest re-paving efforts. Rock Creek Park was the site of various New Deal public works projects, and a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was located in the park from 1938 to 1942, but the federal relief crews focused on general landscape enhancement, foot and bridle path improvements, the restoration of Peirce Mill, and the construction and improvement of miscellaneous structures and recreational facilities, including the Brightwood tennis courts and the park police substation located at the

¹⁴⁹ Letter, Cammerer to Olmsted, 6 June 1934, Olmsted Associates Records, Series B, Job Files 1870-1950, #2837 Rock Creek Park, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁰ Letter, Olmsted to Cammerer, 12 June 1934, Olmsted Associates Records, Series B, Job Files 1870-1950, #2837 Rock Creek Park, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

junction of Beach Drive and Joyce Road.¹⁵¹ Public Works Administration (PWA) funds paid for the construction of five new foot and bridle path bridges in 1934 - 1935. These modest concrete spans are known as the Rapids Footbridge (HAER No. DC-14), Rolling Meadow Footbridge (HAER No. DC-31), Riley Spring Footbridge (HAER No. DC-32), Bluff Footbridge (HAER No. DC-33), and Boundary Footbridge (HAER No. DC-34). Albert Good included one of the Rock Creek bridges in his influential 1938 survey of park and recreation structures. Good generally preferred more conventionally rustic structures, but praised these light, simple concrete structures for exhibiting "a soaring grace" that called to mind the profile of more elaborate suspension bridges. Observing with mixed emotions that the Rock Creek trail bridges were "frankly concrete," the traditionalist Good acknowledged that they were nevertheless suitable for park use on the grounds that the "present day streamline-mindedness must on occasion be served."¹⁵²

The primary Depression era addition to Rock Creek Park's internal circulation was the long-contemplated construction of a more direct spur from Bingham Drive to Daniel Road. This project was undertaken in 1934-1935, most likely with the assistance of federal relief funds. Contemporary photographic evidence suggests that the new section of Bingham Drive was constructed with a bituminous macadam pavement similar to that applied to the original segment a few years earlier, with a medium stone base and wearing course bound with penetration asphalt. Hand labor was employed to smooth and round the road banks in classic park road development fashion.¹⁵³ Unemployment relief crews also conducted slope stabilization and rounding work along the margins of Klinge Road where it passed through the park on the west side of Rock Creek valley.

A 1939 NPS survey of road conditions in Rock Creek Park echoed OPB&PP Director Grant's earlier concern that existing road surfaces were in poor repair and that the entire system was in need of major reconstruction in order to accommodate modern motor traffic. Like Grant, NPS Associate Engineer Alfred Curradi observed that the park's circulation system was essentially a collection of haphazardly improved "horse and buggy roads." The original gravel and macadam surfaces had been superficially treated with repeated sprayings of bituminous coating, but such stop-gap measures were no match for the wear and tear caused by increasingly heavy automobile traffic. Not only had the sporadic improvement program produced a widely varying assortment of road widths and surfaces, with inconsistent crowns and substantial

¹⁵¹ Bushong, "Rock Creek Park Historic Resource Study," 133-144.

¹⁵² Albert H. Good, Park and Recreation Structures, Part I. Administration and Basic Service Facilities (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 186-187.

¹⁵³ No textual records were found for this phase of the Bingham Drive construction. The Rock Creek Park photographic archives contain two photographs of the construction process, dated 1935. Additional photographs depict the bank stabilization project on Klinge Road during the spring of 1933.

portions plagued by poor drainage, but the thin bituminous crust created by repeated sprayings had little structural integrity and was pockmarked with broken, raveling edges and innumerable potholes. Curradi warned that the existing policy of minor repairs and improvements could not possibly keep pace with the damage caused by heavy traffic on the park's main roadways and called for a substantial program aimed at modernizing the park's "obsolete roads." Curradi called for the immediate resurfacing of Beach Drive with a total of 17,406 square yards of bituminous macadam. He also advised the National Capital Parks road maintenance division to replace the two ancient steam rollers it had inherited from the OPB&PP with modern gasoline-powered rollers in order to improve the efficiency its paving operations. Since the NPS, the NCP&PC, and District traffic authorities were still debating the construction of a high-speed roadway from Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to the Maryland suburbs, Curradi recommended waiting for a decision on the proposed development's affect on Rock Creek Park in order to avoid wasting money on improvements that would have to be altered or abandoned if the proposed expressway were to be routed along Beach Drive.¹⁵⁴

Piney Branch Parkway¹⁵⁵

Park officials and District of Columbia transportation authorities had planned on constructing a roadway along Piney Branch ever since the wooded valley was added to the district park system in 1907. The proposed roadway would provide additional access to Rock Creek Park for residents of the rapidly growing neighborhoods east of the park. More importantly, from a practical traffic management perspective, it would serve in conjunction with Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as a convenient commuter artery funneling suburbanites to and from downtown Washington much more efficiently than conventional city streets. Despite the project's widely acknowledged practical and recreational appeal, chronic funding shortages curtailed development until the mid-1930s, when New Deal relief programs finally provided sufficient appropriations to construct a substantial bituminous macadam roadway along the bottom of the valley. When Civil Works Administration crews began working on the project in 1933, a narrow, winding, unimproved dirt road wound along the edge of Piney Branch, intersecting with Beach Drive just below the rustic stone bridge that carried the main park drive over the unpredictable stream. Periodic flooding routinely washed out sections of this primitive roadway, which was not officially maintained by park authorities and in some areas had degraded to the point that it was little more than a glorified bridle path. By 1933 Piney Branch was enclosed in a storm sewer that began a few hundred yards down stream from the Sixteenth Street Bridge. This sewer opened into a concrete floored channel flanked by rusticated stone

¹⁵⁴ Alfred Curradi, "Report on General Survey of National Capital Parks Roads," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Engineering, 27 July 1939, in NPS Central Classified File, 1933-49, National Capital Parks, RG 79, Box 2835, National Archives.

¹⁵⁵ Due to the paucity of textual records available for the development of Piney Branch Parkway, much of the following section is based on information obtained from contemporary photographs filed in the Rock Creek Park photography collection.

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Boston. Massachusetts. Department of Parks. Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park and Related Matters. Boston: Printed for the Department, 1886.

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Cleveland, Horace W. S. The Public Grounds of Chicago: How to Give Them Character and Expression. Chicago: C. D. Lakey, 1869.

_____. Suggestions for a System of Parkways for the City of Minneapolis. Minneapolis: Johnson, Smith and Harrison, 1883.

_____. Public Parks, Radial Avenues, and Boulevards: Outline Plan of a Park System for the City of St. Paul. St. Paul, Minnesota: Globe Job Office, 1885.

road was given traditional brick gutters. Roadside embankments were gently sloped and rounded to reduce erosion and improve appearances. Work on the Seventeenth Street access was begun in 1937 and completed in 1938. Piney Branch Parkway was originally intended to serve as a convenient and attractive means for excursionists to approach Rock Creek Park from the neighborhoods on the park's east side. By the time it was completed, the roadway's perceived purpose had become decidedly more utilitarian and it was increasingly cast as an integral component of the general traffic circulation system of metropolitan Washington. When the main driveway was officially opened in time for the Fourth of July weekend in 1936, the Washington Evening Star declared that the new road would form "an important auxiliary to the new park highway from the north border of the District of Columbia."¹⁵⁷

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway ¹⁵⁸

While the extension of Rock Creek Park into Maryland and the construction of Piney Branch Parkway had significant impacts on the original park road system, the long-anticipated completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway had an even greater impact. Not only did the parkway produce an immediate increase in automobile traffic along Beach Drive, the presence of a relatively high-speed four-lane traffic artery leading straight from downtown to the park's southern boundary created almost insurmountable pressure to construct a major commuter thoroughfare through the park itself. Pro- and anti-expressway forces would battle back and forth for over thirty years while the fate of Rock Creek Park's roads hung in the balance.

The idea of linking Rock Creek Park with central Washington via an attractive roadway dated back to Michler's original 1866 proposal. The Washington Board of Trade took up the cause in the 1880s and the Senate Park Commission made the development of a parkway linking Rock Creek Park and the Potomac parks a prominent element of its 1901 plan for the improvement of Washington's park system. The proposed parkway would enable excursionists to travel from the Mall and other portions of downtown Washington to Rock Creek Park through attractive surroundings without encountering the inconveniences of ordinary city streets. A Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would also provide important urban renewal and public health benefits. While the creek valley above Q Street remained essentially undeveloped with many of the same attractions of Rock Creek Park, the region below the P Street bend was widely regarded as a civic embarrassment and public health hazard. Decades of dumping and industrial development had produced towering banks of debris in the area between P and M Streets. This area was also lined with lower-income housing occupied primarily by African-Americans, which

¹⁵⁷ "New Park Road Opened Along Piney Branch," Washington Evening Star, 4 July 1936; lane-widths and design speed figure are from the Federal Highway Administration's 1988 Engineering Study Rock Creek Park (Arlington, Virginia: Federal Highway Administration Eastern District Federal Division, 1988), A-117.

¹⁵⁸ For a detailed account of the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, see Timothy Davis, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," HABS Report No. DC-697 (National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 1992). The following summary is drawn from this account.

civic improvement forces saw as a detriment to efforts to enhance the area's attractiveness to more "desirable" development. Between M Street and the Potomac River numerous small industries had completely overtaken the valley. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal entered the creek below Pennsylvania Avenue, constraining the waters in a straightened channel regulated by locks. The canal company had constructed a barge-turning basin and transshipment area at the creek's confluence with the Potomac River. The Potomac waterfront was even more heavily industrialized, with the stark structures of the Washington Gas Light Company and the Heurich Brewery towering over the river front. While there was considerable debate over what exact form the development should take, there was widespread agreement that the creation of a parkway linking Rock Creek Park and West Potomac Park would provide manifold practical, recreational, and aesthetic benefits.

Despite this consensus, the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway proceeded at a frustratingly slow pace. Competing ideas about the proper approach to designing the parkway, local political squabbles, and Congress's reluctance to commit substantial funds toward improving Washington's park system dragged the development process out over three decades. Congress authorized the parkway's creation in 1913 but provided minimal appropriations for land acquisition and construction. By the mid 1920s, most of the requisite land had been acquired, but little progress had been made on landscape improvement or driveway construction; a modest bridle path provided the only connection between the West Potomac Park and Rock Creek Park. Even this minor improvement was heralded as cause for celebration. In August 1923, the Washington Herald announced, "Bridle Path, Linking Parks, Cheers Riders/Horsemen Saved Long Trip on City Streets by Direct Route Through Rock Creek Valley."¹⁵⁹ The Evening Star followed with articles headlined: "New Bridle Path Soon to be Ready" and "New Bridle Path to Link Big Parks." Both papers described the bridle path's route along the east side of the lower valley as a great boon to District citizens, though the Evening Star advised that the path between M and P streets was "somewhat heavy in bad weather."¹⁶⁰ The press continued to detail the parkway's slow progress and chronic funding woes throughout the course of the project.

The upper section of the parkway, between Massachusetts Avenue and the zoo, was the first to be completed for automobile use. Widely regarded as the most attractive section of the parkway, it also required the least major construction. Except for the narrow causeway carrying the parkway through the Massachusetts Avenue embankment, the only heavy construction in this section involved shifting the creek channel slightly westward upstream of Massachusetts Avenue to afford easier passage around some cliffs on the east side of the parkway. In fiscal year 1926

¹⁵⁹ "Bridle Path, Linking Parks, Cheers Riders/Horsemen Saved Long Trip on City Streets by Direct Route Through Rock Creek Valley," Washington Herald, 31 August 1923.

¹⁶⁰ "New Bridle Path Soon to Be Ready/Will Connect Potomac and Rock Creek Park Roads When Finished," Washington Evening Star, 14 September 1923; "New Bridle Path to Link Big Parks," Washington Evening Star, 30 September 1923.

alone, however, more than 16,000 cubic yards of earth were moved to raise the roadway beside the creek. Another 3,200 cubic yards were trucked down from the zoo to grade the surrounding slopes. Steel trusses salvaged from the old Aqueduct Bridge were hauled to the site for use the following year in the construction of a narrow two-lane bridge crossing the creek below the open area south of Connecticut Avenue. When the bridge opened in May 1927, the Evening Star advised that it was only a temporary expedient destined to be replaced by a "permanent and artistic structure, in keeping with the surroundings," as soon as adequate funds became available. Stone-faced abutments attempted to meliorate the steel trusses' industrial look, but concern for aesthetics and safety replaced it with a wider stone-faced concrete structure in January 1938.¹⁶¹

Restricted by the shortage of funds, parkway construction inched along. Construction of the road surface between Massachusetts Avenue and the zoo began in 1929, and that section of road was completed by the following June. Extensive grading, sodding, lawn-seeding, and honeysuckle planting accompanied the final construction, helping to blend the new roadway in with its surroundings. Curbs, gutters, post-and-rail fences, and light posts were installed so that at least part of the parkway would have a finished, park-like appearance, and thus serve as an example of the attractive landscape that increased funding would create along the entire length of the parkway. Grading and filling began between Massachusetts Avenue and P Street in 1929. Preliminary grading for the parkway between P Street and Pennsylvania Avenue began in 1930.¹⁶² The imminent completion of Arlington Memorial Bridge focused attention on the Potomac waterfront section of the parkway in 1930-31. A number of large elms were replanted from the east bridge-abutment area to line the course of the future parkway along the waterfront. The seawall was finally completed, allowing for the dumping of more than 21,000 cubic feet of clay fill to extend the riverfront out to the desired line. After the fill settled, the waterfront was attractively landscaped with trees, shrubs, grass, and flower beds. The roadway was graded, and curbs and gutters installed in time to allow work to begin on the actual road surface during summer 1931. By October, the roadway was completed from West Potomac Park to K Street. In mid October long-standing legal difficulties with the C & O Canal Company were finally settled, allowing work to begin on the parkway bridge across Rock Creek near L Street. This structure was to be a steel-girder bridge 40' wide from curb to curb, with a pedestrian sidewalk on the

¹⁶¹ Annual Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1926, 18; Annual Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1926, 29; "Temporary Park Span Soon To Be Open," Washington Evening Star, 3 May 1927; "New Rock Creek Bridge is Begun: Traffic North of Massachusetts Avenue to Continue During Construction," Washington Evening Star, 26 January 26 1938.

¹⁶² "Plans for Next Step in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 29 June 1930; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1929, 37-41; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1930, 41-47.

upstream side and a bridle path on the lower.¹⁶³

While the major project of regrading the valley between Pennsylvania Avenue and P Street remained stalled by continued low appropriations, significant progress was made between Massachusetts Avenue and P Street by 1931. The basic grading was completed by February 1931. By the end of the year, curbs, gutters, and road base were in place and considerable paving and general landscaping accomplished.¹⁶⁴ By April 1932 the parkway was completed from Connecticut Avenue to P Street and from K Street to West Potomac Park. General landscaping work continued in these areas, with hundreds of deciduous and evergreen trees planted and thousands of honeysuckle vines placed for ground cover. Lawns and sod borders were also developed throughout the completed sections of the parkway. The Waterside Drive overpass, with its police observation tower and rest rooms, was completed in June 1932.¹⁶⁵

The chief remaining projects were the upper and lower P Street bridges, and restoration of the troublesome area between P Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, where extensive excavations were necessary to remove the accumulated debris of a century or more of indiscriminate dumping and restore Rock Creek valley to an approximation of its original contours, with enough room provided on the west side of the creek to construct a four-lane driveway along the winding stream. Grant announced that major regrading below P Street would begin in the fall. District commissioners requested \$182,000 for road work and \$250,000 to replace the upper-level P Street Bridge, but received only \$82,000 for general parkway construction and no appropriation for the much-needed bridges. The press supported the appropriations as necessary and long overdue, quoting Commission of Fine Arts executive secretary H. P. Caemmerer's reminder that "this is one of the great city planning projects and transforms an old ravine into a beautiful parkway." Grant publicly criticized Congress's penurious funding and promised that a temporary road could be opened from P Street to M Street by spring 1933, provided that the federal government produced the requested allotment. Grant estimated that full completion of

¹⁶³ "Parkway Section to be Built Soon," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1931; "Reach Agreement for Parkway Span Over Rock Creek," Washington Evening Star, 14 October 1931; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1930, 47; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1931, 68; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 19, 33.

¹⁶⁴ The Office of Public Building and Grounds/National Capital Parks photo collection documents the initial construction in the Q Street Bridge area, a minor landslide, and the subsequent reconstruction of the roadway. (Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 33; "Parkway Section to be Built Soon," Washington Evening Star, 25 February 1931; "Rock Creek Course Diverted by Wall," Washington Post, 20 March 1931).

¹⁶⁵ Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 19, 33.

the parkway was still two or three years away.¹⁶⁶

Continued frustration with meager congressional outlays prompted parkway officials to take a different approach in 1933, when they began seeking funds from federal public works programs in addition to the meager D.C. annual appropriations. Citing the "great amount of excavation work" yet to be done in the valley below P Street, park authorities sought Public Works Administration funding to push the parkway project through to completion. The strategy of constructing the ends of the parkway first had been successful in terms of opening up the two most attractive sections to an appreciative public, but the lack of a connection between the two areas became increasingly embarrassing as construction continued to drag on, with no apparent end in sight. The glaring gap between the completed upper and lower parkway segments would seemingly have been an effective argument for rapid construction of the intervening section, but the parkway continued to come up short in the competition for federal funds. Completion of the parkway bridge above L Street brought additional pressure to speed up the remaining construction, as the new bridge could not be used until the roadway between K and P streets was finished.¹⁶⁷

The valley between these points was the scene of intensive excavations during 1933-1934. Grading equipment, dump trucks, and crews from the Construction Works Administration armed with picks and shovels hacked away at the steep banks of fill on the west side of the valley. This massive effort continued throughout 1934 and into 1935. The earlier bridle path had followed the east side of Rock Creek, but the removal of hundreds of tons of ashes and other debris carved out enough room to fit both the automobile road and bridle path on the Georgetown side of the creek. The parkway's chronic funding woes were finally laid to rest when the National Park Service provided a major infusion of funds for parkway construction in July 1934. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes allotted \$165,000 for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway out of funds authorized by the Hayden Act for road and trail construction in the National Parks. In addition, the District of Columbia offered to supply up to \$100,000 toward the project from its \$900,000 share of the Hayden Act's \$200 million road construction fund. The District received an additional appropriation from federal funds for work on the upper-level

¹⁶⁶ "Parkway Completion Held Halted by P Street Bridge," Washington Evening Star, 3 April 1932; "Plan on Excavating New Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 13 August 1932; "D.C. To Ask Funds for Parkway and Span at P Street," unidentified clipping, 27 June 193(?), P Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives; the Waterside Drive Overpass was built by the National Construction Company and is a reinforced concrete structure faced with stone cut from nearby Maryland quarries (Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 19, 33).

¹⁶⁷ "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "P Street Bridge Contract O.K.'d By District Heads," Washington Evening Star, 19 September 1933; "Rock Creek Drive Fund Hopes Grow/Completion of L Street Bridge Spurs Interest in Finishing Project," Washington Evening Star, 31 September 1933.

P Street Bridge.¹⁶⁸

The press took these appropriations as a sign that completion was imminent and began to sing the praises of the long-awaited parkway. Reporting the National Park Service allotment in July 1934, the Evening Star pronounced, "Long neglected as part of the Washington park system, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway that lies between K and P streets will emerge as a beautiful and serviceable drive." The Washington Post asserted that, by linking the Rock Creek and Potomac parks with an attractive pleasure drive, completing the parkway would produce "one of the most unique public pleasure grounds in the world." The Post dwelt as much on the local park function of the parkway as on its role as a pleasure drive or commuter route. It cast the parkway as an urban oasis that would extend the cool greenery and shady walks of Rock Creek Park into the heart of the city. Referring to the parkway as "this great natural garden," the paper rejoiced that, "in addition to the normal scattered retreats from the heat, noise, and commercial atmosphere, Washington will have a majestic continuous sweep of parkland bisecting the entire city."¹⁶⁹

Despite the Post's enthusiastic pronouncements, considerable work remained to be done. The grading and filling below P Street continued through spring and summer 1935. The roadway between K and P streets finally opened at the end of October with the help of an additional \$80,000 in Public Works Administration funds. The long-delayed bridge carrying the parkway across Rock Creek above P Street remained the final obstacle to unobstructed passage from Rock Creek Park to the Potomac waterfront. Until this bridge was completed, parkway traffic was diverted out of the parkway and up the access roads, where it crossed P Street at grade level before descending to rejoin the parkway on the other side of the unfinished span. The low-level P Street Bridge opened on June 4, 1936. While a few improvements remained to be made--notably the rechanneling of Rock Creek at the P Street bend and the construction of a bridge at Massachusetts Avenue to replace an unsafe and unsightly conduit-and-fill arrangement left over from the turn-of-the-century--it was possible to drive all the way from the upper reaches of Rock Creek Park to Virginia Avenue without leaving a park-like environment or confronting a

¹⁶⁸ The Hayden Act (P.L. 73-393, 48 stat. 993) provided \$200 million in emergency road construction funds, \$24 million of which was earmarked for road and trail construction on federal lands; "District Will Give \$100,000 Toward Valley Road Link," Washington Evening Star, 15 July 1934; "Potomac Link to Rock Creek Park Assured/Ickes Allocates \$165,000 for Thoroughfares Spanning District," Washington Post, 20 July 1934; "Rock Creek Valley Link and Potomac Tract Assured Place in National Capital Parks," Washington Evening Star, 22 July 1934.

¹⁶⁹ "Rock Creek Valley Link and Potomac Tract Assured Place in National Capital Parks," Washington Evening Star, 22 July 1934; "Linking the Parks," Washington Post, 23 July 1934.

traffic signal.¹⁷⁰

The press greeted the parkway's opening with fanfare. The Post and the Evening Star printed numerous articles summarizing the history of the project and singing the parkway's praises. A few reports celebrated the original concept of an urban pleasure ground and recreational link between the city's two major parks. The role of parkways in the urban environment had changed drastically between 1900 and 1935, however. Beginning in the late 1920s, reports on the parkway increasingly emphasized its value as a commuter artery destined to relieve downtown congestion and speed passage to the rapidly developing northwest suburbs. Increasingly, the terms "highway" and "traffic artery" replaced earlier characterizations such as "park-link" and "pleasure drive." With the growing popularity of automobile commuting, the idea of an efficient route to the rapidly expanding northwest suburbs exerted more promotional appeal than the awkward and outdated concept of a "park-link." Grant and other parkway promoters increasingly emphasized development's practical function in their annual pursuits of congressional funding. By 1927, Grant was vigorously promoting the parkway's commuting potential. In a speech to the Kalorama Citizens' Association, he portrayed the future parkway as a vital commuter thoroughfare serving the northwest region of the city. Senator Tydings also emphasized the practical value of the parkway in his 1930 attempts to secure construction funds. An Evening Star article describing Tydings's efforts praised the still-novel parkway innovation of separating cross-traffic to improve traffic flow, and observed, "The completed Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway will provide an important traffic artery to the northward." A 1933 Evening Star article on the parkway proclaimed, "this new traffic artery will relieve downtown congestion to a remarkable degree." An account of the District's \$100,000 allocation in 1934 reported that "the new highway will throw a great amount of traffic through Rock Creek Valley and relieve congestion on a great many streets." By the time the parkway opened, the commuting function dominated the language of press reports and official pronouncements. In its coverage of the opening of the roadway between K and P streets in 1935, the Evening Star asserted, "The special value of the parkway is that it will afford an uninterrupted passage to the downtown area, or to Virginia, by avoiding the many intersections and traffic congestion that plague motorists on the regular street routes." Inaccurately conflating present utilitarian demands with more complex past desires, the Evening Star proclaimed, "When all this work is accomplished, the dream of the planners will be realized, a motor highway through Rock Creek Valley--all the way from the Lincoln Memorial to the East-West Highway in Montgomery County, Md." When the final bridge opened in 1936, the city's traffic director dispensed with homilies about the beauties of nature and declared, "This new driveway is going to be a wonderful outlet for Connecticut Avenue traffic all the way to Potomac Park. There are no grade

¹⁷⁰ "Road to Link The Potomac, Rock Creek Parks," Washington Post, 11 June 1935; "Road linking 2 D.C. Parks is Approved," Washington Post, 6 July 1935; "New Rock Creek Road Link to Open Artery," Washington Evening Star, 24 October 1935; "Parkway's New Thoroughfare to Be Thrown Open," Washington Evening Star, 29 September 1935; "New Park Bridge Will Open," Washington Evening Star 3 June 1936; "Rock Creek Drive is Opened," Washington Post, 4 June 1936.

crossings. It means a straight shot at the heart of the city."¹⁷¹

While most accounts emphasized the parkway's commuting potential, some commentators continued to describe the new road in terms that reflected the parkway's twin traffic and pleasure-drive functions. A June 1935 Post article emphasized the parkway's original purpose, asserting: "When the project is completed, Washington will have one of the most magnificent drives in the world, one which will permit a motorist to drive through two famous parks without once leaving their natural grandeur."¹⁷²

The Post reiterated this theme in a series of parkway articles that emphasized the older, aesthetic and recreational functions of urban parkways. The newspaper advised that by connecting the two major parks, the parkway would "afford a continuous horseback ride or automobile drive from the northern end of the city to the Potomac River." Parkway driving, the Post inferred, was not just a matter of getting from point A to point B as fast as possible. The new parkway would add to the collection of "cool and scenic drives for which the Capital is well known."¹⁷³ The Post repeated its previous year's accolades to the vision and perseverance of Washington's city planners and boasted, "When this road is complete Washington will probably have the longest continuous park drive in any American city. It will certainly have one of the most beautiful of municipal pleasure grounds." After reciting the splendors of Rock Creek Park and the Potomac parks with all the effusiveness of nineteenth-century park advocates, the Post avowed that completion of the parkway ensured that, "more than ever, Washington will be entitled to the distinction of being 'a city of parks.'"¹⁷⁴

The Evening Star echoed its rival's civic pride. As work on the P Street Bridge drew to a close, the newspaper declared, "When that little patch of pavement spanning the creek is

¹⁷¹ "Grant Discusses New Park Drive/Director Hails Boulevard as one of City's Main Traffic Channels," Washington Evening Star, 16 February 1927; "Plans for Next Step in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 29 June 1930; "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "District Will Give \$100,000 toward Valley Road Link," Washington Evening Star, 15 July 1934; "New Parkway to Rank With Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936; "New Rock Creek Road Link to Open Artery," Washington Evening Star, 24 October 1935; "Parkway's New Thoroughfare to Be Thrown Open," Washington Evening Star, 29 September 1935.

¹⁷² "Road to Link The Potomac, Rock Creek Parks," Washington Post, 11 June 1935.

¹⁷³ The Washington Evening Star reported that Frederic A. Delano, chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, decreed this speed "in order to keep the drive from becoming a mere traffic artery." ("Parkway's Speed Set at 22 Miles for Entire Route," Washington Evening Star, 21 June 1936).

¹⁷⁴ "Road Linking 2 D.C. Parks Is Approved," Washington Post, 7 July 1935; "The Missing Link," Washington Post, 8 July 1935.

completed, Washington will have one of the grandest automobile parkways in the world.”¹⁷⁵ Trumpeting the parkway-builder’s achievement the paper announced: “Nowhere else in the world is there a drive of such length and beauty of scenery and natural attractiveness of surroundings. It has been worth the wait, though the time has been long and irksome.”¹⁷⁶

The Evening Star blithely integrated the concerns of twentieth-century commuters and nineteenth-century nature acolytes in a rhapsodic tribute to the parkway. The majority of parkway users might be on their way to work, but the newspaper contended that commuting on the new parkway would be not just a convenient escape from city traffic but a quasi-religious experience. “In less than a month,” proclaimed the Evening Star, “Southbound motorists from the Chevy Chase-Bethesda area will have the privilege of riding downtown through a veritable fairyland, a natural setting for nature’s own worship, and not so much as a traffic light to impede progress. There is, perhaps, no city in the world offering so much beauty for those going to work.”¹⁷⁷

Along with its trivialization of the romantic concept of nature as a source of transcendental inspiration, the language of the Evening Star’s pronouncements exemplified another significant departure from the parkway-designer’s original intentions. In addition to casting the parkway as a “highway,” “thoroughfare,” or “traffic artery,” commentators increasingly transferred the nominal northern end of the parkway from Rock Creek Park to the Maryland suburbs. The original legislation made no mention of the Chevy Chase-Bethesda suburbs: it called for a parkway connection between Rock Creek Park and the Potomac parks. The perceived terminus of the parkway began to shift northward in the 1920s. By the 1930s, articles promoting the parkway rarely mentioned the earlier goal of connecting the two parks. Following completion of the section between P Street and Rock Creek Park in 1932, newspaper accounts routinely proclaimed East-West Highway to be the northern terminus of the parkway. In many accounts, the “park-link” function was forgotten entirely, so that the parkway simply became a road connecting other roads, with East-West Highway and Arlington Memorial Bridge serving as junctures to other road networks. Newspapers hailed the new ability to drive from the District line, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, or “the East-West Highway in Montgomery, Md.” to the Lincoln Memorial. A 1935 Washington Herald article referred to the parkway as the “Highway Link to Chevy Chase” and stated that it was “long promised to Chevy Chase citizens to relieve traffic-jammed Wisconsin and Connecticut Avenues.” When the opening of P Street Bridge completed the final link, the Evening Star’s coverage followed D.C. Traffic Director William Van Duzer’s lead and repeatedly referred to the parkway as “the new Chevy Chase-Potomac

¹⁷⁵ “New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest,” Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

¹⁷⁶ “The Connecting Parkway,” Washington Evening Star, 6 July 1935.

¹⁷⁷ “New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest,” Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

Park driveway.”¹⁷⁸

The Evening Star's article on the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway lauded the road-builder's achievement but raised several issues that would preoccupy park officials, traffic engineers, and various segments of the general public over the next several decades. The Evening Star quoted Van Duzer's warning that the new Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway might already be out-of-date. "The only thing I'm afraid of," Van Duzer warned, "is that it might be necessary to make this winding lane a one-way street in the afternoon." The paper also noted that there was "an odd limitation on the use of the new driveway." The road between the parkway and Rock Creek Park passed through the National Zoo. Since the zoo was only open during daylight hours, the prized link to the Maryland suburbs was severed at nightfall. In addition, the parkway entered the zoo via a ford rather than across a bridge, so that heavy rains regularly closed the highly touted "Chevy Chase-Potomac Driveway." Clearly, neither of these limitations were desirable from a traffic standpoint, especially if the parkway was supposed to function as a major commuter artery. The declaration of one-way rush-hour traffic in May 1937 fulfilled Van Duzer's prediction and offered a measure of relief from commuter congestion. The zoo issue was more complex. Almost thirty years would pass before park authorities, zoo officials, and traffic planners reached an agreement to provide round-the-clock through-traffic between the parkway and Rock Creek Park.¹⁷⁹

The Zoo Tunnel

Following the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, District transportation officials continued their efforts to increase the flow of traffic through Rock Creek valley. The first major obstacle--though ultimately one of the last issues to be settled--was the creation of a permanent, all-weather connection between the north end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park. Until the current tunnel was completed in 1966, parkway traffic entered the zoo grounds through a ford located several hundred yards west of the current bridge. Traffic then followed the zoo roads across another ford before joining Beach Drive on the north side of the zoo. Since the zoo grounds were only open during daylight hours, and the fords were impassable during high water, motorists were often forced to take a roundabout route through surface streets to get from Beach Drive to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The intersection of Beach Drive and the zoo entrance road at Harvard Street frequently created major traffic delays, even in good weather. District transportation engineers viewed the situation as an intolerable obstacle to efficient traffic planning. Park managers endorsed the tunnel concept as a

¹⁷⁸ "Plan Excavating on New Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 13 July 1932; "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "Rock Creek Drive Fund Hopes Grow," Washington Evening Star, 31 September 1933; "Highway Link to Chevy Chase due by Jan. 1," Washington Herald, 13 July 1935; "New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

¹⁷⁹ "New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936; "One-Way Traffic Hours Announced in Rock Creek Area," Washington Evening Star, 12 May 1937.

means of improving access to Rock Creek Park and completing the long sought connection to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Zoo officials objected to the proposal however, and fiercely guarded their territory, fighting numerous delaying actions to prevent the tunnel from invading their domain.

The completion of the northern section of the parkway in 1929 prompted the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks to begin considering several methods of establishing a direct connection with the roads in Rock Creek Park. One plan called for constructing bridges and improving the existing road through the zoo along the east side of Rock Creek. This proposal was tentatively approved by Sherrill, but for topographic reasons the alternative of shifting the creek to the east and constructing a road bed on the west side appeared to offer a more promising solution. The possibility of tunneling under the zoo was offered as a last resort, due largely to the estimated expense of this alternative.¹⁸⁰

Zoo officials resisted all of these proposals, but the steady increase in traffic though the grounds created growing problems for both zoo managers and motorists. The zoo road was rapidly deteriorating, the steady stream of commuter vehicles upset the animals, and motorists were becoming increasingly irritated with the night-time closures, traffic tie-ups, and unpredictable detours. A 1933 editorial in the Washington Evening Star praised Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as a "lovely and extremely useful highway," but called for rapid resolution of the zoo impasse. In a lengthy tongue-in-cheek editorial, the Evening Star complained that zoo animals were receiving better treatment than city taxpayers, who were routinely uprooted in the name of highway improvement. The Star's mock outrage provided a revealing glimpse of nascent resistance to large-scale highway improvements, a response that would gain increasing prominence in the postwar years. Under the headline "The Happy Animals," the Star proclaimed:

Now it is obvious that nothing should be done to disturb the slumbers of the animals at the Zoo. But suppose the Zoo animals were mere taxpayers and property holders? What would be the procedure then? A tunnel? A new thoroughfare around the property? Nonsense! Piffle! The Zoo road would be widened and paved with concrete. A once quiet, winding roadway would be turned into a traffic boulevard. The night would be made hideous by headlights, horns, gears, motors, and possibly petting parties on the lawn of the head citizen--the lion. And the taxpayers would be assessed for 'improvement' of the highway,

¹⁸⁰ Letter, Charles Moore to Dr. W. M. Mann, Superintendent, National Zoological Park, 14 March 1929 (National Zoological Society Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives); "Rock Creek Bridge Projects Studied," Sunday Star, 17 February 1929; "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link/Officials, however, Believe Construction of Road on Eastern Border would be Less Expensive," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "New Rock Creek Road Link to Open Artery/East Bank Zoo Sector is Advocated to Speed Through Traffic," Washington Evening Star, October 1934.

not only the taxpayers who owned property adjoining the highway, but those who owned property half a dozen blocks away. . . . The antelope, the zebra and the kangaroo may think they have a tough time of it. But they can thank their stars that somebody treats them like human beings, guards their interests and protects their sleep. Suppose they were mere taxpayers?¹⁸¹

The Star returned to this theme in a 1935 article titled "Park Road Re-Routed to Save Zoo Slumbers" that similarly criticized zoo officials for putting the sleeping habits of exotic animals above the needs of tax-paying motorists. Zoo officials remained adamant in their opposition to the tunnel plan, but professed to be agreeable to the alternative scheme of replacing the fords with bridges and re-routing Beach Drive to the east side of the creek between Harvard Street and Klinge Road in order to protect the lions and their neighbors from undue traffic noise. Estimated costs for this proposal were expected to be slightly more than \$500,000, which zoo officials insisted should be the sole responsibility of the NPS. Objecting that the proposed tunnel would permanently disfigure the beauty of the zoo grounds, zoo officials asserted that they would do everything possible to prevent its construction.¹⁸²

Negotiations over the zoo bypass continued throughout the 1930s, with District highway experts leaning increasingly toward the tunnel option and zoo officials refusing to give ground for either alternative. Dissuaded by the million-dollar price tag of the initial tunnel proposal, the Department of the Interior proposed a shorter and less expensive configuration that would run directly through the hill underneath the zoo administration building. Occupying essentially the same path as the present tunnel, the cost for the revised project was estimated at \$665,000, which included \$100,000 for a new bridge to carry the parkway over Rock Creek. By October 1939, estimates for the cost of the shorter tunnel had risen to \$1.15 million with the inclusion of provisions for a grade separation at Harvard Street and a second tunnel to carry the parkway extension through the bluff below Adams Mill Road. Acting Secretary of the Interior E. K. Burlew suggested that the two tunnel proposals be included in an upcoming Bureau of Public Roads study of Rock Creek Park and recommended that the connection be completed as soon as possible. The NCP&PC, which had vetoed the original tunnel proposal at an earlier meeting, voiced support for the shorter tunnel scheme in October 1942.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ "Rock Creek Drive Fund Hopes Grow/Completion of L street Bridge Spurs Interest in Finishing Project," Washington Evening Star September 31, 1933; "Rock Creek-Potomac Drive," Washington Evening Star, 19 July 1935; "The Happy Animals," Washington Evening Star, 7 July 1933.

¹⁸² "Park Road Re-Routed to Save Zoo Slumbers," Washington Evening Star, 16 June 1935.

¹⁸³ Memorandum, Arthur Demaray to E. K. Burlew, Administrative Assistant, Department of the Interior, 6 March 1937, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; letter, Demaray to Burlew, 21 October 1939, NPS-NCR Roads file, RG 79, National Archives; letter, Acting Secretary of the Interior Burlew to Melvin Hazen, President, D.C. Board of Commissioners, 12 December 1939, NPS-NCR Roads file, RG

World War II put a halt to the tunnel plans and created a backlog of projects that received higher priority in the immediate postwar years. By the early 1950s, traffic planners were once again pressing for a permanent, high-volume connection between Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Beach Drive. Studies showed that zoo ford was closed for all or part of the day at least half of the year. The Star continued to press for the tunnel's construction, complaining that "The slightest flash rain usually is enough to force zoo police to haul out the ford barriers and route disgruntled motorists back to city streets."¹⁸⁴ Budgetary constraints frustrated an attempt to revive the tunnel project in 1951. The NPS allocated \$265,000 to build the tunnel in 1953, but the money was spent elsewhere when zoo officials again refused to grant permission for the project. A new, expanded tunnel plan was readied in 1954 and reluctantly approved by both the NPS and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC -- the NCP&PC was re-organized and renamed in 1952). These agencies were concerned that the tunnel would be seen as the first leg in the extension of an expanded Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway up through the park--a project that D.C. and Maryland highway officials were actively promoting and the NPS and NCPC were adamantly opposing. The new plan called for a pair of two-lane tunnels running through the hill beneath the zoo office. When this plan was presented to zoo officials in 1957, they objected once again, arguing that the proposed road and tunnel development "would seriously interfere with the basic recreational and scientific functions of the Zoological Park."¹⁸⁵

Despite NPS Director Conrad Wirth's stern reminder that the enabling legislation for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway specifically stipulated that the parkway was to connect with Rock Creek Park, the Smithsonian Institution, which controlled the zoo property, threatened to tie up matters with further legal and bureaucratic maneuvering. Realizing that the process could drag on indefinitely, the NPS offered to include zoo officials in the planning process. The NPS also promised to build a large new parking lot for zoo visitors, construct a fence to screen the parkway from the zoo, and provide a new connection to the zoo from Harvard Street. In 1960 the Smithsonian finally acquiesced to a modified proposal calling for the construction of one 750' two-lane tunnel similar in length and location to the one originally proposed in the late 1930s. The Smithsonian agreed to transfer a strip of land between the north tunnel portal and Harvard

79, National Archives; minutes of NCP&PC meeting, 15-16 October 1942, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; "Rock Creek Park Traffic Remedies to be Sought," Washington Evening Star, 2 March 1941.

¹⁸⁴ The Star reported that the zoo fords were closed all day on 122 days in 1955 and at least part of the day on an additional sixty-two days ("Park's Beach Drive Open from Zoo to Maryland," Washington Sunday Star, 19 April 1956).

¹⁸⁵ "Economy Eliminates Parkway Extension to 16th St. Through Zoo," Washington Evening Star, 17 October 1917; "New Tunnel to Extend Parkway Through Zoo," Washington Evening Star, 14 April 1960; Letter, Leonard Carmichael to Conrad L. Wirth, 25 February 1957, Zoo Bypass File, RC&PP, NCR-NPS Records, WNRC (quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 83).

Street to the NPS so that Beach Drive could be shifted to the east side of the creek and brought down to meet the tunnel.¹⁸⁶

The Evening Star greeted the announcement of the tunnel agreement with skeptical praise, warning readers of earlier unfulfilled promises to solve the zoo traffic problem. The Evening Star supported the highway department's Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway extension plans and expressed its hope that the omitted second tunnel would eventually be built to carry all four lanes of the parkway into the park, but hailed any improvement as a long-overdue boon to commuters. "In a few years," the newspaper predicted, "if all goes well, the quiet beauty of Rock Creek Park will give thousands of us new-found enjoyment on the trip outward from the city."¹⁸⁷

While the newspapers focused on the commuting potential of the proposed connection, park management preferred to downplay this aspect. The Washington Post reported, "Park officials conceded this link, like new sections of Beach Drive, north of the zoo, will help commuters. But they said its main purpose is to serve visitors to the Park and the Zoo." The Post stated that the bridle path through the zoo would be relocated so that it, too, could be used at all times and suggested that the "two quaint fords" might be retained for use by zoo visitors. While the Post duly reported the official assertion that the tunnel was designed primarily to benefit park visitors, its broader implications were underscored in the paper's reference to the project as the "missing link" in Rock Creek Parkway and concomitant observation that the tunnel would finally enable motorists to "drive the whole length of Rock Creek Park on dry land." A contract was signed with A. S. Wilkerstrom of Skaneateles, New York, in June 1962, to construct the tunnel at a cost of \$1,536,584. The tunnel, connecting roads, and bridge across Rock Creek north of Calvert Street opened in fall 1966. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall personally dedicated the tunnel in a grand ceremony accompanied by a brass band. The lower ford between the parkway and the zoo was abandoned and the roadway leading to it from the parkway closed. Inspection of the upper and lower fords in 1998 showed them to be still recognizable but severely deteriorated. Volunteer tree growth completely obstructed the old roadway leading from the lower ford to the present parkway drive.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Letter, Wirth to Carmichael, 1 May 1957; letter, Carmichael to Wirth, 3 May 1957; Letter, Wirth to Carmichael, 13 March 1959; Letter, Carmichael to Wirth, 7 August 1959; Letter, Carmichael to Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton, 15 March 1959; Zoo Bypass File, RC&PP, NCR-NPS Records (quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 84); Interview with Rock Creek Park Assistant Superintendent Michael Brown, 12 August 1992.

¹⁸⁷ "No Fooling," Washington Evening Star, 18 April 1960.

¹⁸⁸ "New Rock Creek Parkway Link to Include Tunnel Through Zoo," Washington Post, 15 April 1960; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 84; photographs of Udall and the band, dated 19 August 1966, can be found in the Rock Creek Park Photography Collection.

Park Roads, Parkways, or Expressways?

The zoo tunnel was just one of several projects that District highway officials called for to enhance the flow of traffic between downtown and the northwest suburbs. Declaring that the increase in traffic caused by the proposed tunnel would rapidly overburden the antiquated park road system, Commissioner Melvin C. Hazen advanced a plan in 1938 to build a four-lane expressway through Rock Creek Park as far as the District line. In doing so, Hazen explicitly ignored National Capital Parks Superintendent C. Marshall Finan's suggestion that the best and least destructive way to accommodate commuter traffic would be to extend and improve Daniel Road (present day Oregon Avenue), which ran along the west boundary of Rock Creek Park.¹⁸⁹ Hazen's initial proposal located the new highway directly along Rock Creek. Given the widely expressed support for the newly completed parkway in the lower valley, the idea of extending its streamside configuration through the park must have seemed a logical progression. The prospect of cramming four lanes of traffic along the picturesque, meandering stream north of the zoo struck most observers as a vastly different proposition than constructing a parkway through the degraded lower Rock Creek valley, however. Hazen's proposal was roundly condemned by park officials and by the Washington press. The Evening Star acknowledged that an expressway from K Street to the East-West Highway might make sense "from the standpoint of traffic engineering," but contended that it was "about the worst thing that could happen to Rock Creek Park." Praising Rock Creek Park as "a haven for those who seek refuge in the heart of nature from the rush, the bustle and confusion of modern life," the paper asserted that the traffic problem should be solved "without turning beautiful Rock Creek Valley into a roaring boulevard, shrouded in the haze of exhaust vapors."¹⁹⁰

Temporarily chastened, the District Highway Department submitted a revised plan that spared most of the creek bottom scenery by relocating the highway through the densely wooded area on the west side of the park. After passing through the hilly terrain east of Broad Branch, the expressway would parallel Daniel Road, creating a speedy, four-lane thoroughfare running along the western edge of the park as far north as East-West Highway. While less destructive than Hazen's initial proposal, this scheme also required a significant sacrifice of park land, prompting a series of negotiations between the District Commissioners, the NPS, the NCP&PC, the Public Roads Administration, and the Smithsonian, along with frantic correspondence from expressway adversaries to the aging Olmsted attempting to enlist his opposition to the proposed destruction of park scenery. The Washington Daily News implied that a significant source of pressure to upgrade the park roads came from members of Congress who disliked being tied up

¹⁸⁹ Finan's proposal is discussed in "Rock Creek Highway Planned," Washington Evening Star, 26 April 1936.

¹⁹⁰ "Spare the Park," Washington Evening Star, 28 June 1938.

in traffic en route from their suburban residences to Capitol Hill.¹⁹¹

Throughout 1941-1942 the NCP&PC raised a number of objections to the expressway proposal, criticizing it on both practical and philosophical grounds. Commission members U. S. Grant III and John Nolen, Jr., argued that Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was already overloaded with commuter traffic and warned that the additional traffic generated by the parkway extension would create bottlenecks that would throw the entire District traffic system out of balance. Regardless of its effect on park values, Grant asserted, the proposed roadway was "bad planning" from a practical point of view. The noted city planner Harland Bartholomew appeared before the commission to advise against the project. "One of such express highways was built through [a] St. Louis park," he observed, "and we have come to think if we had it to do over again, we would not put it in that location." Bartholomew asserted that recent experiences in other cities had demonstrated that building commuter thoroughfares through parks was a self-defeating proposition. While locating limited-access expressways in stream valley parks had initially seemed to be offer an ideal solution to urban traffic congestion, such roads had only accelerated the trend toward automobile commuting. The additional traffic soon overloaded the new roadways, creating even greater pressure to sacrifice remaining parkland for even larger highways, which inevitably became clogged by the ever-increasing stream of commuter vehicles. Bartholomew strongly urged District highway planners to reconsider the long-range merit of their proposal, which he summed up as "a very undesirable thing to do through Rock Creek Park."¹⁹²

The increasing pressure to upgrade the road system through Rock Creek valley prompted Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes to complain that Washington's rapid growth called for an increase in the area devoted to parks and parkways, rather than the continued sacrifices demanded by transportation planners. "At the rate we are going," he complained, "the parks of Washington will soon be nothing but glorified boulevards. There will be no problem of playgrounds and recreation areas but only of traffic arteries, overpasses, underpasses, cloverleaves, automobile parking lots and sites for schools and office buildings." Pointing to the recently completed parkway as a prime example, Ickes observed, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkways [*sic*] have become main traffic arteries, so that their preservation for park use and enjoyment is becoming increasingly difficult."¹⁹³ District highway officials attempted to counter

¹⁹¹ "Rock Creek Park Traffic Remedies to be Sought," Washington Evening Star, 2 March 1941; "New Roads Projected Through Rock Creek Park," Washington Daily News, 21 February 1941.

¹⁹² Minutes of the 176th meeting of NCP&PC, 17-18 September 1942; Minutes of 177th meeting of the NCP&PC, 15-16 October, 1942; NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

¹⁹³ "Warning Against Further Encroachment upon the Parks and Playgrounds of the National Capital," Statement of Hon. Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, at 165th meeting of NCP&PC, 16-17 October 1941, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, NCP&PC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

such objections by insisting that America's entrance into World War II made the construction of a high-speed thoroughfare to improve traffic flow to downtown offices a military necessity and patriotic duty. Opponents countered that the same claims had been made during World War I and that the nation's security had not been appreciably damaged by the failure to widen roads in Rock Creek Park.¹⁹⁴

NCP&PC member Henry Hubbard was particularly outspoken in his opposition to the proposed parkway extension. Hubbard wrote Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. in September 1942, imploring the senior landscape architect to come to Washington and make a personal statement against the highway plans. Hubbard implicitly likened the highway department's designs on the District park system to the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany. He declared that park allies could not meekly stand by and condone the sacrifice of parkland in the futile hope of satisfying the highway engineers' territorial ambitions. Hubbard urged the commission to respond decisively to the highway department's attempted incursion, asserting that the "Appeasement of the forces destructive of recreation spaces has had no effect other than to encourage further aggression." Contending that the real problem was not inadequate roadways but the government's misguided policy of concentrating federal employment in downtown Washington, Hubbard complained that until federal office buildings were more widely dispersed, "There will be no limit to the encroachment upon the parks and recreation facilities in the interest of greater and speedier access to the heart of town." While the temporary office buildings on the Mall could be removed once the national emergency passed, Hubbard observed, "The provision of speedways through parks, however, is not temporary. Once the speedway is in, the park is gone."¹⁹⁵

While planners and park officials were vehemently opposed to further road development in Rock Creek Park, Olmsted was more sympathetic to the practical concerns of local traffic authorities. In his reply to Hubbard, Olmsted characterized the extension of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway through Rock Creek Park as not only inevitable, but "eminently reasonable as a matter of general city planning." Never an all-holds-barred preservationist, Olmsted was a pragmatist with strong faith in the ability of landscape architects to reconcile conflicting demands through careful planning and sensitive design. He acknowledged the need to improve the flow of traffic to the northwest suburbs and agreed that an efficient roadway could be developed along the west side of the park without unduly compromising its scenic values. Olmsted qualified his support for an extended "Rock Creek Parkway" with several provisos: the parkway extension must be carefully designed to minimally affect the park landscape; a continuation of the route into the Maryland suburbs must be provided in order to prevent further

¹⁹⁴ "Planners Guard Park Beauty in Roads Project," Washington Evening Star, 20 November 1942.

¹⁹⁵ Letter, Hubbard to F.L. Olmsted, 31 September 1942, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

traffic congestion; and the increase in traffic from the new thoroughfare must not overburden the existing roadway below the zoo. Olmsted acknowledged that the highway department's proposal was deficient in all these areas, but he argued that it would be better to cooperate with District officials and develop a well-designed parkway extension, "rather than take an obstructionist stance, with every possibility that an unwise express route would be 'bulled through' in a rush regardless of park values." While he accepted the highway engineers' contention that better provisions for through-traffic were "ultimately desirable," Olmsted suggested that the NCP&PC "fight for time" by agreeing to conduct a joint study of alternate routes and landscape treatments. Olmsted's response reflected his firm belief in the ability of landscape architects to solve the complex problems of modern urban development. He had already demonstrated a willingness to countenance additional road development in Rock Creek Park in his 1918 management plan. While opponents of additional road development in Rock Creek Park frequently cited the Olmsted's Report's opening manifesto to augment their preservationist stance, Olmsted's plan had envisioned the construction of multiple traffic arteries criss-crossing the park in a far more disruptive fashion than even the most aggressive postwar highway engineer would dare to contemplate. One of these proposed arterials approximated the Beach Drive/Broad Branch/Daniels Road expressway route favored by District of Columbia and Maryland highway officials. Olmsted's reluctance to lend his support to the anti-expressway cause may also have stemmed at least in part from economic self-interest, since his firm could well expect to be involved as consultants on the project.¹⁹⁶

Following Olmsted's advice, acting NPS Director Arthur Demaray wrote a conciliatory letter to District Engineer Commissioner Col. C. W. Kutz before the next NCP&PC meeting, urging that the agencies work together to devise a master plan for the development of roads and bridges in Rock Creek Park. Demaray suggested that the NCP&PC make a preliminary general plan, after which the Public Roads Administration would develop detailed engineering studies. This arrangement would allow the NCP&PC to ensure that the Olmsted report's "dominant consideration" policy remained in effect. In particular, Demaray asserted, there could be no new roads in the valley floor along Rock Creek or on the steep hillsides above the zoo. After the NCP&PC held further discussions on the road matter, Demaray sent Kutz another letter containing more detailed guidelines for the improvement of the road system in Rock Creek Park. These included numerous specific suggestions about the zoo tunnel and potential cross-park bridges. Kutz and his cohorts in the Public Roads Administration immediately complained that the new guidelines were too restrictive. World War II temporarily sidetracked the negotiations, but the debate continued throughout the 1940s, with the NCP&PC provisionally agreeing to an extension of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway through the zoo tunnel as far north as Blagden Avenue, but strongly opposing the proposed connection to Oregon Avenue. The NCP&PC preferred that northbound traffic be directed eastward along Colorado Avenue to Sixteenth

¹⁹⁶ Letter, Olmsted to Hubbard, 5 August 1942 (NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives).

Street, and recommended widening Sixteenth Street to serve as the major northwest commuter thoroughfare. The District Highway Department, meanwhile, produced its Highway Improvement Plan of 1944, which called for the transformation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway into a major northwest expressway.¹⁹⁷

After the war, the District of Columbia Highway Department and the D.C. Board of Commissioners renewed their efforts to expedite traffic flow throughout Metropolitan Washington. The first major postwar transportation study, prepared by the engineering firms J. E. Greiner Company and De Leuw, Cather and Company for the D.C. Board of Commissioners in 1946, called for a series of three circumferential beltways interconnected by a system of high-speed radial expressways. The 1946 Transportation Plan for Washington asserted that such "modern roadways" were essential to the well-being of every urban dweller, not only to improve traffic circulation but to rehabilitate slum areas and breathe new life into downtown areas, which were supposedly suffering from the lack of vehicular access. Employing the mixed biological metaphors favored by many urban planners, the report warned that failure to build such a comprehensive system of modern roadways would allow "creeping paralysis to engulf the city's traffic arteries." Failure to strengthen this vital circulation system would cause the city to become "flabby and dissipated." The report praised the newly completed Shirley Memorial Highway in Arlington, Virginia, as a model for the design of efficiently engineered modern expressways. Grand Central Parkway in New York City, the Outer Drive in Chicago, and the Arroyo Seco Parkway in Los Angeles were also cited as models for Washington's expressway system. The slow, inefficient, prewar parkways may have satisfied an earlier generation's penchant for leisurely Sunday driving but, according to the traffic engineers, modern drivers needed modern, scientifically designed express highways. "Expressways," the report declared, "are an engineering answer to the public's desire to make travel Facile, Fast, and Foolproof." Unlike the prewar parkway promoters, these postwar highway engineers expressed little concern for the aesthetic or recreational aspects of motorways, describing the new roads simply as "channels for the uninterrupted movement of vehicles."¹⁹⁸

The 1946 transportation plan portrayed Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and its proposed extension through Rock Creek Park as vital components of the new highway system. The consulting engineers claimed that with several key improvements, the expanded roadway could carry a major portion of the city's northbound traffic. The expanded parkway would serve

¹⁹⁷ Letter Demaray to Kutz, 15 September 1942; letter, Demaray to Kutz, 28 October 1942; memo, "Principles for the Preservation of Rock Creek Park and the National Zoological Park"; minutes of the 178th meeting NCP&PC, 19-20 November 1942; minutes of the 224th meeting of NCP&PC, 23 January 1947; minutes of the 234th meeting of the NCP&PC, 29-30 January 1948; NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; for more on the District's 1944 highway plan, see Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 239.

¹⁹⁸ J. E. Greiner Company and De Leuw, Cather & Company, Transportation Plans for Washington (prepared for Board of Commissioners, District of Columbia, 1946), 1-12, 17.

as a major radial thoroughfare, tunneling through the zoo, following the controversial route through the west side of the park, and connecting with the planned extension of U.S. Route 240 in Maryland. According to the consulting engineers, these improvements could be done "without seriously detracting from the natural beauty of Rock Creek Park." In fact, traffic experts contended throughout the expressway controversy that extending the parkway north of the zoo would actually increase the value of Rock Creek Park by making it more accessible. The report asserted, "Enjoyment of that beauty by the additional hundreds of thousands of motorists who would thus be accommodated each year would more than compensate for any small loss in landscaped area." While the NCP&PC continued to oppose the creation of new roadways within Rock Creek Park, it agreed with the Greiner-De Leuw report's basic conclusion that the District highway system needed major improvement.¹⁹⁹

While the consulting engineers' studies called for only minor improvements to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the roads in Rock Creek Park, the District Highway Department's own report sounded a more ominous note. In keeping with the postwar predilection for massive urban redevelopment projects aimed at rebuilding entire districts from scratch according to rational modernist principles, A Preliminary Report of the Findings of an Origin and Destination Traffic Survey in the Metropolitan Area of Washington, D.C. Conducted in 1948 insisted that ridding the District of traffic congestion would require "more than the mere salvage of old and obsolete roads." Asserting that "Highway transportation is one of the main props of our highly organized society," the report dismissed piecemeal road-widening and other minor improvements as unscientific stopgap measures. The highway department declared that the District's roadways would have to be "redesigned and rebuilt almost in their entirety." Unlike the narrow and inefficient prewar parkways, these new highways should be constructed "on a generous scale" in order to ensure "the safe, orderly, rapid flow of the vast traffic volumes that stream daily in and out of central business districts." Even when existing roads appeared capable of handling existing volumes of traffic--as was the case with Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway--they needed to be redesigned in order to serve anticipated traffic needs calculated decades into the future, and rebuilt accordingly. Despite the highway department's proclamations, the NCP&PC postponed ruling on all major highway initiatives until after the completion of the commission's long-awaited comprehensive Washington-area regional plan.²⁰⁰

The 1950 Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and Its Environs was a broad-based regional planning effort that addressed the development of the Washington metropolitan region on a grand scale. Instead of focusing primarily on the physical design of cities in the

¹⁹⁹ Transportation Plans for Washington, 24, 29, 33; Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 239, 277.

²⁰⁰ District of Columbia Department of Highways, A Preliminary Report of the Findings of an Origin and Destination Traffic Survey in the Metropolitan Area of Washington, D.C. Conducted in 1948 (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Division of Printing and Publications, 1950), vii; Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 239.

manner of their turn-of-the-century predecessors, postwar urban planners grappled with a wide array of issues including housing, land use, economic development, and broadly construed transportation policies. Acknowledging that traffic congestion had reached critical levels, the report recommended a three-pronged attack on the commuter problem. The comprehensive plan called for revamping the highway system, improving mass transportation, and dispersing federal employment beyond downtown Washington. In practice, however, highway improvement proposals continued to dominate District transportation planning throughout the 1950s. The report called for rapid implementation of the circumferential beltway and radial highway systems, emphasizing that "these new and improved main highways must be modern--at least divided highways, and preferably freeways for all types of traffic." Parkways restricted to pleasure traffic and express buses would also comprise an important component of the regional system. In order to guarantee "maximum traffic capacity and safety"--and to be eligible for federal funding--both freeways and parkways needed to be built to "high standards of curves, grades, and pavement width." The comprehensive plan depicted Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as an upgraded "express parkway" extending through the zoo, along Beach Drive, and up Piney Branch Parkway to Sixteenth Street. Regional highway officials, however, had more ambitious plans for the Rock Creek valley corridor.²⁰¹

The Regional Highway Commission was formed in 1950 in order to address mounting traffic problems in the Washington metropolitan area. This commission was dominated by highway engineers, being composed of representatives from the D.C. Department of Highways, the Maryland Roads Commission, the Virginia Department of Highways, the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, the Military District of Washington, the Capital Transit Company, and the NCP&PC. The commission's report, issued in January 1952 and immediately adopted by the D.C. Highway Department, called for radically altering Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to turn it into a major radial thoroughfare to accommodate the ever-increasing commuter traffic between downtown Washington and the northwest suburbs.²⁰² As adopted by the District Highway Department, the plan envisioned transforming Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway into a modernized, six-lane expressway at an estimated cost of almost \$7 million. The plan called for two additional lanes north of Q Street and the transformation of the parkway south of P Street into a southbound express route. Northbound traffic would follow 26th Street, which would be widened to expressway dimensions between Constitution Avenue and M Street, with grade separations to eliminate cross traffic. The parkway bridge south of Connecticut Avenue would have to be expanded to accept six lanes of traffic. A grade-separation structure would theoretically solve the increased congestion where access roads from Calvert Street, Cathedral

²⁰¹ National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, Washington: Present and Future: A General Summary of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and Its Environs (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), 27.

²⁰² Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia," (prepared for National Capital Planning Commission, 1952), 1.

Avenue, and the zoo tunnel intersected. Above Connecticut Avenue, the report called for a four-lane expressway extending through Rock Creek Park to link with U.S. Route 240 (now 270) in Maryland.²⁰³

The proposed changes to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the threat of extending the parkway through Rock Creek Park generated significantly different responses. When compared to the impassioned resistance to highway construction in Rock Creek Park, the largely indifferent reaction to the proposed radical transformation of the parkway landscape suggests that Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was already perceived primarily as a commuter thoroughfare rather than as a public park. The Evening Star warned that the plans for an expressway through Rock Creek Park would undoubtedly create "fireworks," but the newspaper asserted that Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was so outdated that it could no longer legitimately be called a parkway. "The first trouble with the parkway now is that it's not a parkway in the modern sense," complained the Star. "Modern parkways are divided." While the newspaper admitted the parkway was "fairly wide," it claimed that it was nevertheless too narrow for modern traffic. The Star claimed that most Washingtonians agreed the parkway was overcrowded and asserted that the one-way rush-hour traffic practice was confusing and dangerous. The continued reliance on the undependable zoo ford was also widely criticized.²⁰⁴

The National Park Service and the NCPC engaged the prominent consulting firms Clarke and Rapuano and Harland Bartholomew and Associates to evaluate the District's Highway Improvement Program.²⁰⁵ Both firms emphasized the need to strike a balance between improving access to the central city and preserving the qualities that made the city of Washington attractive in the first place. The Clarke and Rapuano report characterized the opposing forces in this battle as the "Keep off the Grass" mentality of inflexible park defenders and the "There's a park; it's vacant, free land and provides an easy route to follow" attitude of the highway interests.²⁰⁶ The consultants cautioned against the District's single-minded focus on highway improvements at the expense of mass transit, pointing to the Comprehensive Plan's conclusion that new highway construction would never be able to keep pace with projected increases in suburban population. The consultants acknowledged that some highway improvements were

²⁰³ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia," 34-36.

²⁰⁴ "Rock Creek Parkway Additions Would Doom 'P-Street Beach,'" Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1952. An accompanying photograph of the area depicted a predominantly female crowd of sunbathers.

²⁰⁵ Gilmore Clarke and Michael Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia as these Projects Relate to the Parks and Parkways under the Jurisdiction of National Capital Parks of the National Parks Service" (New York: Clarke and Rapuano, 1952).

²⁰⁶ Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 2.

necessary, but stressed that expressways should not be constructed solely on the basis of traffic volumes and destination surveys. Their effects on broader aspects of the urban experience needed to be factored into the engineers' calculations. The Bartholomew report also challenged the highway engineers' insistence that new expressways inevitably raised property values and stimulated local economies. While this was a favorite contention of highway advocates--and had proven true in the case of attractively designed suburban parkways--Bartholomew noted that the introduction of heavy traffic often adversely affected the quality of residential neighborhoods. Clark and Rapuano similarly employed economic arguments to question the wisdom of building expressways through parks and residential areas. They asserted that parks were almost always better influences on property values. Clarke and Rapuano also insisted that parks were also better suited to promoting "those qualities within a city that add to the graciousness of urban living."²⁰⁷

Both reports stressed the symbolic importance of Washington's parks and public places, emphasizing the special care needed to ensure that traffic improvements not detract from the beauty and dignity of the national capital. Praising the skill and foresight of L'Enfant and the Senate Park Commission, Clarke and Rapuano declared that Washington's planners had an historical obligation to protect the city's irreplaceable heritage of parks, monuments, and grand vistas from improvident "errors of expediency" that appeared to solve current problems but would not stand the test of time. Admitting that traffic improvements were necessary, the Bartholomew report stressed that, "A proper balance must be struck between the demands of traffic and the maintenance of the priceless scenic values and unspoiled character so carefully fostered since the city's founding."²⁰⁸

While both consultants expressed great reservations about the proposed expressway construction in Rock Creek Park, they more-or-less agreed with the highway-boosting Evening Star as far as Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was concerned. Bartholomew and Associates questioned the scale of the proposed expressway, but conceded the necessity of upgrading Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The report cautioned, however, that in constructing the improvements, "great care should be exercised to reduce damage to the park to the greatest extent possible."²⁰⁹ Clarke and Rapuano's report expressed more concern over the proposed changes to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. This was to be expected, as Clarke and Rapuano were among the nation's leading parkway designers, playing an important role in the

²⁰⁷ Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report on Proposed Highway Improvement Program," 4-5, 49-52; Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 2, 9, 26-29.

²⁰⁸ Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report on Proposed Highway Improvement Program," 5; Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 9.

²⁰⁹ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia," 61-62.

development of the pioneering Westchester County parkways. Their report acknowledged that, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway has, since its opening, operated more as an arterial road than as a pleasure drive." Nevertheless, they advised that decisions on the parkway's future should take into account its value as an attractive and popular urban park.²¹⁰ While reaffirming the significance of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's naturalistic landscape, Clarke and Rapuano did not condemn the basic idea of expanding the main traffic artery. They merely quibbled with proposed road alignments in the vicinity of Q Street Bridge and opposed the new Normanstone Drive access road. Clarke and Rapuano contended that it would be impossible to construct an adequate roadway at the designated location and proclaimed that the attempt "would be ruinous to a rare bit of natural beauty in the urban area."²¹¹

Both Bartholomew and Clarke and Rapuano were particularly concerned with the effects the proposed expansion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would have on the two jewels of the city's park system: the Mall and Rock Creek Park. Complacency toward the changes along Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway reflected its subsidiary role, first as a "park-link" and then as a commuter route. While it was an attractive roadway and served a useful purpose as a neighborhood park for surrounding residential areas, the parkway offered neither the extensive natural amenities of Rock Creek Park nor the monumental grandeur of the Mall and the Potomac waterfront. The consultants' greatest concerns about the proposed improvements to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were directed at their potential impact on the more prestigious parks to the north and south. Bartholomew and Associates opposed a direct southbound connection between the Whitehurst Freeway and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway on the grounds that it would cause an undesirable increase in the amount of traffic through the Potomac parks. Both reports expressed concern about the inevitable pressure to extend the parkway through Rock Creek Park if it were expanded to a six-lane roadway as the most ambitious traffic plans proposed.

The Proposed U.S. 240 Extension and Capital Beltway Development through Rock Creek Park

While even the highway engineers seemed to lose interest in the proposed "improvements" to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the proposal to construct a radial thoroughfare through Rock Creek Park and appropriate a section of the Maryland portion of the park for the Capital Beltway ignited considerable controversy. Maryland highway and

²¹⁰ U. S. Grant III, who had served as director of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission during the final design and development stages, expressed regret that the commuting function had overshadowed the project's park values. In a 1953 letter opposing the extension of the parkway's four-lane configuration through Rock Creek Park, Grant noted that he was still proud of the parkway's overall contribution to the District park system, but regretted that "the land bordering the road is no longer used by the public as the lower stream valley used to be used and enjoyed in its natural state." The fate of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Grant declared, demonstrated that "Fast moving traffic and outdoor recreation are just incompatible." (Letter from Grant to Sen. Murray, 2 March 1955, reprinted in American Planning and Civic Comment [March 1955], 34).

²¹¹ Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 26-27.

development interests battled over these proposals with the NCPS, NPS, local citizens groups, and national conservation organizations throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. The 1952 Recommended Highway Improvement Program restated the highway engineers' long-standing goal of constructing an express highway connection from downtown Washington to U.S. 240 in Maryland, which served as a major feeder to the rapidly growing suburbs of Montgomery County. This plan was strongly supported by the Maryland Roads Commission, which insisted that both the 240 extension and the beltway construction were essential to the economic survival and social well-being of Montgomery County and surrounding regions. The Maryland Roads Commission used the issue to drive a wedge between the NCPC and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), which felt compelled to support the highway project on both general social and economic terms and, it appears, as a means of asserting the state commission's independence from national oversight. The NPS opposed these intrusions, as did a number of local citizens groups and national conservation associations. The Commission of Fine Arts also spoke out against the renewed expressway proposal.²¹² The NCPC was put in the position of mediating the dispute. Commission members with backgrounds in planning and landscape architecture were generally opposed to the proposed expressway development, but the commission included highway engineers, as well, who were more sympathetic to the Maryland Roads Commission's assertion that additional freeway construction was desirable and inevitable. The D.C. Highway Department remained conspicuously silent on the proposed improvements, allowing the Maryland Roads Commission to take the lead. Expressway opponents interpreted the D.C. Highway Department's uncharacteristic reticence as a strategic decision based on the hope that completion of the more politically feasible incursion into the Maryland portion of the park would create an insurmountable demand to construct a high-speed expressway from the end of U.S. 240 at the District Line through Rock Creek Park itself into Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Unfortunately for the highway promoters, the opposition to expressway development proved to be much more concerted and effective than they had envisioned.²¹³ Before it was over, the debate over expressway construction in Rock Creek Park escalated into a national test case of the propriety of appropriating park land for freeway development. If highway interests could get away with ramming a six-lane freeway through the crown jewel of the park system of the nation's capital, conservationists warned, then no park in America was safe from their depredations.

The battle over expressway development in Rock Creek Park began in earnest during the summer and fall of 1953 as the NCPC held a number of highly publicized meetings in response to the Maryland Road Commission's plans. By 1953, the Maryland Roads Commission, working in conjunction with their D.C. colleagues, had decided that the only way to solve the region's mounting commuter congestion problem was to extend U.S. 240 through Rock Creek Park and

²¹² Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 17 November 1953, 8.

²¹³ Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 17 November 1953, 6-8.

augment this radial thoroughfare with a circumferential beltway that would facilitate traffic movement throughout the D.C., Virginia, and Maryland suburbs. Both the beltway and U.S. 240 would be constructed as four-lane dual highways with safety medians and broad-sweeping alignments to accommodate high-speed traffic. According to the Maryland Roads Commission, the two expressways would share a one-and-one-half mile long 198'-wide right-of-way carved out of the Maryland extension of Rock Creek Park between Wisconsin Avenue and Connecticut Avenue. This would necessitate several major alterations in the course of the creek and leave a mere 150' or so of trees on either side of the parallel freeways. Nevertheless, the highway proponents insisted the project's negative impact would be minimal and that skillful landscaping would preserve the park's scenic beauty. The beltway would continue along Rock Creek to Forest Glen before passing out of the park. The U.S. 240 extension would drop south out of the park temporarily about half a mile west of Connecticut Avenue, cutting through several neighborhoods before entering the park again near East-West Highway, crossing the creek just inside the District line, then cutting a swath through the west side of Rock Creek Park all the way down to the zoo tunnel. Neither the Maryland nor D.C. highway departments made any effort to disguise their intention to extend 240 through the D.C. portion of Rock Creek Park, though they insisted the second phase of the proposed development would not take place for years. Following the highway engineers' lead, the Washington Post characterized the project as an extension of Rock Creek Parkway and a means of "bringing Route 240 downtown." The U.S. 240 extension, the Post reported, would fulfill "the highway builder's dream--an attractive, fast-moving roadway from the congested suburbs to the city." Just as Virginia officials were pressing for additional Potomac River crossings in order to spur economic development in northern Virginia, Maryland developers, businessmen, and politicians were concerned that inadequate highway connections to downtown Washington would soon begin to slow growth in the northwestern suburbs. Without the construction of a modern expressway through Rock Creek Park, highway proponents insisted, the northwest suburbs would succumb to "traffic strangulation."²¹⁴ The Maryland and D.C. highway departments had the support of D.C. Engineer Commissioner Brig. Gen. Louis W. Prentiss, who declared that the only alternative would be to transform Connecticut Avenue and Sixteenth Street into express highways or spend untold millions and displace thousands of homeowners to develop an alternate route across private land. Succumbing to heavy pressure from the Rockville Chamber of Commerce and Maryland Roads Commission Chairman Russell H. McCain, the M-NCPPC broke ranks with their D.C. planning brethren and endorsed the expressway project.²¹⁵ Pent-up demand made the eventual construction of one or two more radial expressways inevitable, highway proponents

²¹⁴ Minutes of NCPC Meeting, 29-30 October 1953; press release, Russell H. McCain, Chairman of Maryland Roads Commission, 24 June 1953, U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

²¹⁵ Minutes of NCPC, 25-26 June 1953; letter, Wyman to NCPC, 19 May 1953; Letter, Wyman to NCPC Acting Director Remon, 15 July 1953; "National Fight on Route 240 Shaping Up," Washington Evening Star, 8 December 1953; Letter, John Nolen, Jr., to Ralph W. Baxter, Director, Rockville Board of Trade, 25 February 1954; U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

insisted, so the NCPC should face the facts and acquiesce to the highway department's plans.²¹⁶

On the other side of the debate stood the National Park Service and an assortment of citizens groups and conservation organizations. National Capital Parks Superintendent Harry T. Thompson insisted that the NPS was "unalterably opposed" to the project and vowed that the agency would "do everything we can to avoid the project of Route 240 through Rock Creek Park." Thompson advised the Commission of Fine Arts that the proposal to terminate the expressway at the District line was an obvious ruse. He accused Maryland highway interests of "carrying the baton" for the D.C. Highway Department, knowing that it would be virtually impossible to stop construction of the final link in the chain if U.S. 240 were constructed right up to the border of Rock Creek Park.²¹⁷ The NPS assigned staff landscape architect Ray Schenck to review the 1918 Olmsted Report to gather ammunition to oppose the highway builders plans. Schenck pulled together a series of quotes from the Olmsted Report underscoring the importance of subordinating road development to scenic preservation, highlighting Olmsted's insistence that the "dominant concern" in managing the park should be "the permanent preservation of its wonderful natural beauty." Schenck detailed the Olmsted Brothers's various recommendations and then concluded that the report as a whole called for a management philosophy that would be severely violated by the proposed highway construction. "Any dual, high-speed road with freeway characteristics," Schenck maintained, "... would destroy and remove from the area natural features which once destroyed could never be replaced." Schenck suggested that the best alternative would be to construct an express parkway along the east side of Rock Creek Park. Not only would this spare the attractive woodlands threatened by the highway department's plans, it would pass through less rugged terrain and connect more easily with the proposed zoo tunnel, avoiding the necessity of sacrificing the picturesque valley of Broad Branch for expressway construction. While Schenck did not mention this consideration, constructing an expressway along the east side of the park would shift the roadway's negative impact from an exclusive white neighborhood populated by many prominent and powerful citizens to an African-American neighborhood, whose residents, though still relatively well-to-do, did not wield anywhere near the same political power.²¹⁸

A number of residents of the wealthy suburbs on the east side of the park were well-versed in making their opinions heard, however, and wasted no time in mobilizing to oppose the

²¹⁶ "How U.S. 240 and the Belt Route Would Affect Rock Creek Park," Washington Evening Star, 14 August 1953; "Key Planners Call Parley to Decide Fate of Proposed Rock Creek Parkway Leg," Washington Post, 28 October 1953.

²¹⁷ CFA Minutes, 11 November 1953, 6, 8.

²¹⁸ Ray M. Schenck, Landscape Architect, NPS, "Preservation and Development of Rock Creek Park: Brief Review of Pertinent Sections of 1918 Report By Olmsted Brothers as Related to a 1953 proposal for a Rock Creek Express Parkway," 30 July 1953, NCPC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

proposed expressway. The Maryland highway engineers had made the mistake of locating their proposed expressway through or near the backyards of a number of past and present government officials, lawyers, and other powerful suburbanites, who were not at all pleased by the prospect of expressway construction lowering their property values, invading their local park, and, in some cases, forcing residents to forsake their homes to provide room for the short section of freeway that veered out of the park right into the exclusive precincts of Chevy Chase. More than a dozen neighborhood groups banded together under the leadership of local resident and former North Dakota Sen. Gerald P. Nye to form the Citizens' Action Committee for Fair Road Planning, which lobbied energetically against the highway proposal. Nye's group mustered over 3,800 signatures of local residents opposed to the project. The coalition published pamphlets and took out advertisements in local newspapers to express its concerns. Among the groups forming this organization were neighborhood associations from prestigious communities such as Chevy Chase Village, Chevy Chase Hills, Parkview Estates, and Rollingwood, along with the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, the Chevy Chase Women's Club, the American Planning Association, The Committee of 100 on the Federal City, and the National Parks Association.²¹⁹

Praising Rock Creek Park as a "priceless possession" and a "gem of natural beauty," the Citizen's Action Committee for Fair Road Planning ridiculed the highway commission's assertion that the proposed expressways would have minimal impact on Rock Creek Park. "With its dips and elevations, its overpasses and submarine underpasses, with its tunnels and its thirty-acre cloverleaf approaches," one of the coalition's public missives declared, "it would be a nightmare, a monstrosity to Rock Creek Park itself, and a danger to thousands of children, picnickers, park friends and nature lovers, who now enjoy the quiet loveliness of its natural beauty." Expressway opponents argued that the proposed roadway was not only needlessly destructive of park values, but unnecessary as a traffic relief measure and illegal as well. Rock Creek Park, highway opponents noted, had been set aside by Congress as park land for recreational and scenic preservation purposes: any alternative use that detracted from this function was not just ill-advised but a willful violation of federal law. While the Maryland portion of Rock Creek Park was owned and managed by the state rather than the federal government, it had been acquired with federal funds under the 1930 Capper-Cramton Act, which, highway opponents insisted, expressly stated that the land was to be preserved as a public park with limited road development for recreational purposes. One coalition-sponsored publication invoking the provisions of the Capper-Cramton Act in opposition to the expressway proposal was emblazoned with the headline "President Hoover and Governor Ritchie didn't cross their fingers when they signed this!" Criticizing the M-NCPPC for backing the expressway proposal in direct opposition to their predecessors' intentions, the coalition called on the NCPC to exercise wiser judgement. The coalition repeatedly urged the citizens of the nation's capital to rally in defense of their park. In another polemic published as a paid advertisement in the Evening Star,

²¹⁹ Copies of these materials can be found in the Rock Creek Park File, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library.

the anti-expressway coalition condemned the highway interests as aspiring "Squatters" and emphasized that the Maryland Roads Commission was "carrying the ball" for the D.C. highway department with the clear intention of extending the proposed expressway all the way through to the center of the city." The coalition rejected the argument that a six-lane expressway through Rock Creek Park was essential to the social and economic well-being of Montgomery County and Washington metropolitan region in general, contending that the best way to solve the area's congestion problem was to build an outer loop beltway, improve traffic flow on existing radial thoroughfares such as Wisconsin Avenue and Sixteenth Street, and promote greater reliance on public transportation. The coalition even acknowledged that it might be necessary to consider the eventual improvement of roadways within Rock Creek Park, but insisted that the roadways should be kept as parkways, not expanded into six-lane expressways.²²⁰

While Nye and his associates may have been influenced at least in part by selfish interest in preserving their own property values and neighborhood amenities, opposition to the expressway proposals was expressed from many quarters and reflected widespread concern about the incursion of freeways into parks on both the local and national level. The letters-to-the-editor columns of the local papers were inundated with protests against the proposed incursion into Rock Creek Park. Typical of the emotional responses to the prospect of an express highway through Rock Creek Park was former D.C. public librarian George Bowerman's plaintive query, "Why should the most beautiful section of Washington be spoiled to gratify the perverted ideas of speed maniacs?" While the Evening Star lent its support to the pro-expressway forces, the Washington Post swung back and forth, editorializing against the proposal and condemning the short-sightedness of the "bulldozer minded" in a widely applauded July 1953 editorial unambiguously titled "Desecrating Parkland," but "reluctantly" admitting that both of the proposed expressways were necessary in a subsequent column that raised the specter of "traffic strangulation" and insisted "the park is wide enough to accommodate a highway without great harm." National Parks Association Executive Secretary Fred Packard praised the Post for its initial stand against the expressway and condemned the highway engineers for having "little appreciation of the importance of parks to the welfare of the people or of the values that would be destroyed by the mis-location of major vehicle arteries through such areas." Pointing to the 1950 Comprehensive Plan's admonition to address the region's traffic issues through a broad-based program that included greater emphasis on mass transportation, Packard contended that highway authorities had made little effort to consider alternatives to the proposed expressway through the park. According to Packard, the highway engineers' insistence that an expressway through Rock Creek Park presented the only viable means of solving the region's

²²⁰ "Squatters in Rock Creek Park!" Citizens Action Committee for Fair Road Planning advertisement in Washington Evening Star, 12 June 1953; "President Hoover and Governor Ritchie didn't cross their fingers when they signed this!" Citizens Action Committee for Fair Road Planning pamphlet or newspaper advertisement, ca. July 1953; "Is the Use of Rock Creek for An Expressway Really Necessary," Citizens Action Committee for Fair Road Planning pamphlet; all in Rock Creek Park file, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library.

transportation problem reflected the profession's ingrained philosophy that "parks are a luxury that can be spared and that lands reserved for park purposes represent the easiest and cheapest method of relieving motor traffic." The Isaac Walton League, Wilderness Society, and a host of other conservation organizations also came out against the plan. Representative Louis C. Cramton, co-author of the 1930 act that had helped create the Maryland section of Rock Creek Park, wrote to American Planning and Civic Association Secretary Harlean James expressing his outrage that a "scenic area so prominent in the scheme of the nation for a capital world famous for its beauty is to become simply an avenue for the ever-mounting streams of traffic." Cramton declared that the objective of the Capper-Cramton Act had been to secure land for "park areas, not high speed turnpikes" and asserted that those who had supported the original legislation would have been utterly opposed to the "proposed desecration, or rather destruction, of Rock Creek Park by usurping that scenic and recreation area to superhighway and speedway use." Even Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay went on record opposing the highway extension, calling it a "desecration" of invaluable parkland.²²¹

While the majority of letters opposed the highway extension, several writers accused the highway opponents of selfish motivations and cultural elitism for objecting to a road that would benefit commuters in the more affordable outlying suburbs and provide greater access to a section of Rock Creek Park that functioned almost as a private preserve for wealthy Chevy Chase residents. John Kenmuir, who identified himself in a July 1953 letter to the Evening Star as "a suburbanite who must struggle through the few Washington streets capable of carrying traffic to the suburbs north of the capital," derided the "purple prose" and "crocodile tears" of "those who continually try to obstruct the normal advance of progress by crying about 'despoiling the beauties of nature.'" In addition to raising the issue of elitist protectionism, Kenmuir pointed to the example of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as a road that both served commuters and enhanced the ability of District residents to enjoy attractive natural surroundings.²²² M-NCP&PC Chairman Robert Wyman voiced similar sentiments in a letter to the NCPC confirming the Maryland commission's support for the expressway project. Wyman maintained that a high-volume expressway through the park would enable thousands of motorists

²²¹ "Desecrating Parkland," letters to the editor, Washington Post 10 July 1953; Irston Barnes, "Rock Creek Park Seen as Temple," Washington Post, 12 July 1953; "Highway in the Park," editorial, Washington Post, 30 October 1953; Bowerman to NCPC, 14 June 1953; U.S. Grant III to NCPC, 25 June 1953; Nye to NCPC, 21 April 1953; letter, Cramton to Harlean James, secretary of American Planning and Civic Association, 4 September 1953; McKay's statement appeared in a Department of Interior press release dated 7 July 1953; these letters and other petitions can be found in the Rock Creek Park file, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library and in the NCPC Maryland Roads and U.S. 240 Planning Files, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

²²² Kenmuir asked the Evening Star's readers to consider whether "the lower part of Rock Creek Park has been spoiled or improved by the parkway that not only enables Maryland residents to ride into Washington in some degree of safety or comfort, but also permits District residents to proceed to Maryland and visit some real parks, free of sewage and crime problems?" (John Kenmuir, letter to the editor, Washington Evening Star, 2 July 1953).

to enjoy an area of natural beauty that was currently the secluded playground of a few wealthy suburbanites.²²³ The characterization of the expressway debate as a conflict between Washingtonians and residents of the outer suburbs also appeared in a Washington Post column authored by the Audubon Society's local chapter president, Irston Barnes. Barnes reprinted an impressive array of quotes from noted historical figures praising Rock Creek Park. Asserting "Rock Creek Park is one of the city's happiest features to many Washingtonians," he declared, "to others, who live in Maryland and who do calculations about cars shuttling back and forth, it is a wasteland that has always been destined to become a motor highway." Taking the other side of the debate, the pro-expressway Evening Star repeatedly noted that the opposition was led by a small cadre of wealthy homeowners whose houses were located in the path of the proposed highway and chastised the National Parks Association for getting involved in local development issues in support of "selfish property owners." National Parks Association Executive Secretary Packard responded by underscoring that Rock Creek Park was a part of the National Park System and asserting that its preservation was of vital importance to all American citizens. Characterizing the proposed expressway as an "outstanding example of inept planning," Packard repeated the association's contention that the project would destroy invaluable natural resources while offering only fleeting relief from traffic congestion that could be more effectively alleviated by following the broader remedies outlined in the 1950 Comprehensive Plan.²²⁴

Caught in the middle of this controversy, the NCPC ruled against the U.S. 240 extension but decided that planning for the proposed beltway segment could proceed. While the NCPC made it clear that approval for a full-fledged expressway through Rock Creek Park would not be forthcoming, it agreed to consider the possibility of modestly upgrading the existing park drives up to the District line. As a precautionary measure designed to prevent the highway interests from using the beltway segment as a means of pushing U.S. 240 up to the border of Rock Creek Park, the NCPC insisted that no direct connection could be constructed between the beltway and the existing park road system. The commission stipulated that the beltway through the park be constructed to parkway standards with attendant prohibitions against trucks and commercial vehicles and reserved the right to pass judgement on the highway engineers' designs.²²⁵

²²³ Letter, Wyman to NCPC, 19 May 1953; letter, Wyman to NCPC Acting Director Remon, 15 July 1953; U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives. The Washington Times-Herald surveyed members of Washington Real Estate Board on the park expressway issues; unsurprisingly, most of this inherently pro-development sample supported the project (Dale Chestnut, "Inquiring Camera Girl," Washington Times-Herald, 28 December 1953).

²²⁴ Irston Barnes, "Rock Creek Park Seen as Temple," Washington Post, 12 July 1953; "National Fight on Route 240 Shaping Up," Washington Evening Star, 8 December 1953; "Clarifies Stand on Expressway," letter to the editor from National Parks Association Fred M. Packard, Washington Evening Star, 23 December 1953.

²²⁵ Minutes of NCPC meeting, 25-26 June 1953; NCPC statement, 26 June 1953; Minutes of the NCPC meeting, 6-7 August 1953, NCPC Maryland Roads and U.S. 240 Planning Files, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

The NCPC's compromise satisfied neither side. Maryland highway officials insisted that both roadways were necessary. At a special meeting called to discuss the highway issue, the majority of M-NCP&PC members reaffirmed their support of the road commission's plans, maintaining that the U.S. 240 extension was consistent with comprehensive regional planning guidelines that advocated the use of stream valley parks for traffic corridors. The M-NCP&PC and the Maryland Roads Commission attempted to make a state's rights issue out of the controversy, contending that the Capper-Cramton Act could not be interpreted as infringing on the sovereignty of the state of Maryland. Dismissing the argument that the Capper-Cramton Act gave federal planners the right to veto the proposed construction, M-NCP&PC member Donald Gingery insisted that simply because the Maryland portion of Rock Creek Park had been acquired with "a little bit of Federal aid," did not mean that the NCPC exercised authority over land that belonged to the state of Maryland. Gingery asserted that the NCPC's obstructionist meddling in Maryland affairs demonstrated that it was time for the Maryland commission to assert its independence from federal oversight. Seizing on these arguments, Maryland Roads Commissioner Russell H. McCain insisted that the NCPC could not prevent U.S. 240 construction from proceeding as far south as East-West Highway, anyway, since the M-NCP&PC had given the necessary permission to use the Maryland portion of Rock Creek Park. The NCPC interpreted the situation differently, pointing out that the Capper-Cramton Act specified that any future improvements in the Maryland portion of the park be approved by both the M-NCP&PC and NCPC. The NCPC declared that the act thus gave it veto power over the U.S. 240 extension. The NCPC reaffirmed its decision in a highly contentious meeting with Maryland highway officials at the end of October. The Maryland Roads Commission continued to press for both projects but in an effort at conciliation agreed to construct the beltway segment as two 24'-wide roadways separated by a 30'-wide grassy median. In a further effort to minimize the project's effect on park scenery, the proposed beltway location was also moved to the south edge of the Maryland extension as far as was practicable. McCain insisted that the beltway road bed be laid out and graded so that the grassy median could be converted into additional traffic lanes, however. McCain also complained that delays caused by the NCPC's interference was costing Maryland taxpayers \$20,000 a week in added design and construction costs.²²⁶

While the highway interests condemned the NCPC as meddling obstructionists, expressway opponents were incensed with the commission's tentative approval of the beltway

²²⁶ Press release, Russell H. McCain, Chairman of Maryland Roads Commission, 24 June 1953; Statement and Resolution of the M-NCP&PC, 30 June 1953; letter, McCain to NCPC Chairman Bartholomew, 28 October 1953; letter, McCain to NCPC Chairman Bartholomew, 5 November 1953; minutes of NCPC Meeting, 30 October 1953; Maryland Roads and U.S. 240 Planning Files, NCPC RG 328 National Archives; Richard Lyons, "Rock Creek Belt Route Approval is Expected," Washington Post 30 October 1953; "Accord Likely on Maryland's Belt Freeway," Washington Evening Star, 30 October 1953; George Beveridge, "Planners Fail to Back Rte. 240 Leg After Talks with State Officials," Washington Evening Star, 31 October 1953; Sam Zagoria, "Partial Nod Given Rt. 240 Leg; OK on 'Belt' Brings Confusion" Washington Post, 31 October 1953; Sam Zagoria, "Planner Sees 240 S.E. Leg Still Possible," Washington Post, 1 November 1953.

segment. The NCPC viewed the beltway segment as a justifiable compromise, since it only impacted a small section of the park and promised to relieve pressure for the more damaging direct route through the heart of the park. At the time, regional planners were touting circumferential beltways as a means of lessening congestion by dispersing traffic around cities and thus reducing the demand for high-volume radial expressways. The NCPC subscribed to this theory and undoubtedly felt it had achieved a major victory by trading a remote stretch of parkland for the more disruptive U.S. 240 extension. The anti-expressway forces adamantly opposed any expressway construction in either section of the park, however, and suggested that the NCPC had either sold out or been duped by Maryland highway and development interests. Several owners of property adjacent to the proposed development even brought suit against the NCPC, charging the commission with violating the provisions of the Capper-Cramton Act. Park defenders warned that allowing the beltway to enter even a small portion of the park would set a dangerous precedent that would lead inevitably to the construction of the long-coveted radial thoroughfare connecting U.S. 240 with Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Former senator Nye, writing for the Citizens Action Committee for Fair Road Planning, castigated the NCPC for "letting the highway camel get its nose under the tent" by approving the beltway link across the north edge of the park. The Maryland Roads Commission, of course, had every intention of eventually pushing this connection through. Just as expressway proponents predicted, the Maryland Roads Commission was already asserting that if the NCPC could approve the beltway segment, there was no reason to deny permission for the U.S. 240 extension, since both would supposedly be constructed to the same "parkway" standards.²²⁷

Designating the proposed beltway segment a "parkway" fooled no one, however. Opponents assailed the NCPC for condoning the disingenuous "parkway" designation and continued to characterize the proposed construction as a "high-speed highway" or "expressway." Not only was there considerable skepticism that the highway engineers would honor their commitment to develop the roadway along scenery-saving parkway design principles, but also no one honestly believed that commercial traffic and heavy trucks would be forced off a one-and-one-half mile segment of the circumferential beltway, which was intended to function as the region's primary high-speed roadway and an integral component of the national highway system. Constructing the roadway with the broad curves, minimal grades, and wide, sturdy pavements required to accommodate commercial trucks and heavy commuter traffic would make it virtually impossible to incorporate the attractive and environmentally sensitive design techniques employed in contemporary parkway and park road development. The M-NCP&PC maintained the fiction that trucks would be excluded and cited the Westchester County parkway system as an example of the successful integration of parks and commuter thoroughfares, proclaiming that

²²⁷ George Beveridge, "Suit to Attack Use of Park for Belt Highway," Washington Post, 10 November 1953; Sam Zagoria, "NCPC Sued to Retract Park Route Approval," Washington Post, 21 November 1953; Nye quoted in letter, Citizens Action Committee for Fair Road Planning to NCPC, 23 October 1953; letter, McCain to Bartholomew, 28 October 1953; U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

the proposed highway would bring more people into the park and thus increase the opportunity for Washingtonians to enjoy nature. The NCPC countered that significant differences between the Westchester system and the Rock Creek Park situation made this comparison irrelevant and misleading. A consulting engineer engaged by the M-NCP&PC agreed with this assessment, and subsequent statements dropped the Westchester County comparison, though the M-NCP&PC conspicuously shifted its terminology and began referring to the proposed express routes as "parkways" in an effort to make them more palatable to potential opponents. This semantic sleight-of-hand failed to win many converts to the highway engineers' position, however. As American Planning and Civic Association President U.S. Grant III observed, "Calling a high speed expressway for trucks a 'parkway' as it enters the park, and then changing its name back again when it leaves, does not alter what it actually is."²²⁸

By December 1953 the expressway debate had evolved from a local issue to a national controversy. Nye and his colleagues on the Citizens Action Committee for Fair Road Planning outlined the case against the Rock Creek Park expressway proposals in a December 7 meeting of the National Resources Council, an association of thirty-nine conservation organization with contacts throughout the country. Nye outlined the highway engineers' plans and rallied support by casting the proposed expressways as not just a desecration of the park system of the nation's capital, but a threat to parks across the country. Kentucky conservationist Tom Wallace echoed Nye's dire predictions, asserting that "the proposed Rock Creek express highway is a threat to public parks in every United States city and state." Underscoring that Rock Creek Park was both part of the National Park System and "one of the most beautiful city parks in the world," Wallace warned, "If this precedent could be established in Rock Creek Park, no public park would be safe." A week later, at a special meeting called by the Wilderness Society to organize opposition to expressway development in Rock Creek Park and other elements of the D.C. park system, local Audubon Society Chapter President Irsten Barnes pleaded for support, observing that D.C. residents had no voice in Congress and contending that "nothing but letters to Congressmen from *beyond* Washington can put an end to this foolishness." The Conservation New Service issued press releases presenting the preservationist side of the debate and the national media took up the story. Prominent conservation magazines such as American Forests and Audubon Magazine editorialized against the project and the popular television program "The Outdoorsman" denounced the expressway proposal, asserting--somewhat inaccurately--that the proposed

²²⁸ Fred M. Packard, "Parks and Highway Development," letter to the editor of the Washington Post, 23 December 1953; Grant quoted in "National Fight on Route 240 Shaping Up," Washington Evening Star, 8 December 1953; John Nolen, Jr. to Hugh R. Pomeroy, Westchester County Planning Commission, 27 July 1953; Memorandum, William M. Burgess, planning engineer, to M-NCP&PC, re: Observations on New York Parkway Inspection Tour as Related to Local Problems, 5 August 1953. Burgess contended that generalizations were impossible, and that all parkways had to be treated as individual cases; in the Westchester and New York instances, strong central planning and efficient mass transportation contributed greatly to the success of the parkway systems; neither of these factors appeared to him to be present in the Washington region (Maryland Roads and U.S. 240 Planning Files, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives).

freeway would destroy not just Rock Creek Park but the National Zoo as well. American Forests emphasized that parks throughout the country were under siege from similar expressway construction threats and cast the fight over Rock Creek Park as a crucial battleground for highway opponents. "If engineers establish a beachhead in Rock Creek Park," the magazine warned, "no town or municipal park in the world will be safe." Refusing to countenance the engineers' argument that parks offered the only practical avenues for expressway development and criticizing the National Park Service for exercising insufficient vigilance to ensure that the lands with which it was entrusted remained "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations," as the agency's original mandate insisted, American Forests asserted, "It is high time that the American public called a halt to encroachment of our great systems of parks by express highways and other 'expediencies' that tend to impair the purposes for which the parks were created." The additional national publicity effort had the desired effect, as letters denouncing the expressway proposals poured in from across the country. The American Institute of Park Executives passed a resolution condemning the proposed expressway and the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, the National Wildlife Association and other national conservation organization voiced their opposition to the project.²²⁹

The Maryland Roads Commission and M-NCP&PC attempted to ameliorate this criticism by hiring the Olmsted Brothers firm to prepare a design for the circumferential beltway, which the agency had taken to calling the "Beltline Parkway." The decision to employ the Olmsted Brothers was a conspicuous attempt to capitalize on the firm's prominent name and longtime association with the park system of the national capital. A handsome brochure outlining the firm's proposal emphasized the premier landscape architects' national reputation and impressive accomplishments in the Washington region. Ironically, this promotional piece highlighted the Olmsteds' contributions to Rock Creek Park and Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Island--the two local parks under greatest threat by highway development proposals. Associating the beltway project with the Olmsted name achieved the desired effect, at least with the sympathetic Evening Star, which applauded the decision in a glowing editorial and repeated the Maryland officials' contention that involving the firm should "allay the fears and misunderstandings that have stalled the undertaking."²³⁰ The Olmsted Brothers firm of 1954 bore little resemblance to the Olmsted

²²⁹ "National Fight in Route 240 Shaping Up," Washington Evening Star, 8 December 1953; "Threat to Our Parks," editorial, American Forests 60 (January 1954): 9; "Highway Poses Threat to Rock Creek Park," American Forests 60 (August 1954): 39; Irston Barnes, "Shall Our Capital Have Parks or Parkways?" Audubon Magazine 56 (March-April 1954): 74-76; Carl D. Shoemaker, "Should Rock Creek Park Be Used For An Automobile Expressway?" Conservation News Service press release 8 December 1953, Rock Creek Park file, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library; "The Outdoorsman" episode referenced in letter from Mrs. Hal W. Geyer, Milford, Delaware, to Director, National Zoo, 6 January 1954 (this and other letters of protest collected in Maryland Roads planning file, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives).

²³⁰ This editorial emphasized that the plans would be developed "by consultants known to be advocates and protectors of park land, here and elsewhere." ("Fortunate Choice," Washington Evening Star, 25 March 1954). M-

Brothers firm that prepared the Rock Creek Park general management plan of 1918, however. John Olmsted had passed away in 1920. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. was 84 years old and living in Palo Alto, California, where he had more or less retired from active design work. The firm was no longer at the forefront of American planning and landscape architecture and had long since ceded its preeminence in parkway design matters to Clarke, Rapuano, and other alumnae of the Westchester County Park Commission. Edward C. Whiting was the senior Olmsted Brothers landscape architect and took responsibility for running the project. Olmsted himself had virtually nothing to do with it. In fact, internal office correspondence suggests that Olmsted opposed the project on general principles and was not exactly pleased that his namesake firm had been put in the position of rescuing the highway engineers' ill-conceived plans. When apprised of the firm's contract with the M-NCP&PC, Olmsted appeared somewhat taken aback and insisted that the proposed expressway be reconceived as a multi-purpose development combining parkway-style drives with recreational facilities and attractive landscaping. In a terse letter to the Olmsted Brothers' secretary that was circulated among the firm's top-level employees, Olmsted declared, "I want to say that I am strongly opposed to a freeway or general traffic route through Rock Creek Park, especially along or near the Creek. It would divert the Park from recreational purposes to grossly conflicting purposes."²³¹

Olmsted's associates did their best to follow his instructions. The resulting plan was a conscientious attempt to make the best of a bad situation; had it been followed, the Capital Beltway would be a considerably more attractive highway than it is today, though concomitantly less efficient. The proposed roadways wound in gentle curves that promised to be considerably more attractive than conventional expressways, though in order to accommodate higher speeds and traffic volumes they were considerably straighter than most contemporary parkways. Fears that the beltway would display the typical highway engineer's penchant for rigidly straight roadways achieved through massive cuts-and-fills were allayed by sinuous, terrain-hugging alignments that minimized the need for excessively destructive excavations. According to the M-NCP&PC's brochure, which described the proposal in appealing language provided by Olmsted Brothers, the parkway drives would be located at the edge of the park as far as possible to reduce construction impact, and side slopes would be gentle and rounded, "merging naturally with the flattish floor of the Park. The new proposal called for a variable-width median, which,

NCP&PC chairman Watkins traded heavily on the Olmsted Brothers' reputation in Washington park planning in a letter to NCPC chairman Bartholomew, 20 March 1954; in U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

²³¹ "Development Plans for Rock Creek Park Units 2 and 3, Montgomery County, Maryland," prepared by Olmsted Brothers for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the State Roads Commission of Maryland," (1954), brochure in Rock Creek Park File, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library; letter, Olmsted to Obst, 30 March 1954, Olmsted Post-1949 Correspondence Collection, Job #9970 Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission; National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

the publicity brochure proudly pointed out, was designed "to avoid the rigidity of a uniform highway alignment, to save some large trees and other established growths, and to provide more leeway for landscape developments between the two roadways." Where the beltway cut directly across the park near Forest Glen, considerable destruction of existing scenery was unavoidable, but, the M-NCP&PC promised, "with appropriate grading and planting, the Parkway embankments can be easily developed as harmonious parts of the enframement of the adjacent landscape or Park Units on either side." While the NCPC had insisted on restricting access from the beltway to the park, the Olmsted Brothers' "Beltline Parkway" plan called for numerous turnouts to accommodate the elaborate complex of recreational features the firm called for in order to make the development function as a multi-use recreational landscape and not just as a high-speed traffic corridor. Olmsted Brothers' determination to transform the controversial expressway into an attractive and universally acceptable parkway was evident in the firm's insistence that an elaborate program of forest improvement, vista clearing, and carefully coordinated planting was necessary in order to properly "enframe the Park landscape," to produce attractive "landscape pictures," and to shield parkway users from surrounding developments. If all these goals were achieved, Olmsted Brothers maintained, the proposed development would function as "a parkway in fact" and not just in name. Olmsted Brothers produced an impressively detailed sixteen-foot-long scale model of the proposed development, which was presented at NCPC hearings on the project and placed on public display at the M-NCP&PC headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, in what commission officials admitted was a concerted bid for "public understanding and support." Everyone who came in to view the impressive diorama was given a copy of the promotional brochure and a photograph of the model.²³²

The attractive, multi-purpose development outlined in the Olmsted Brothers' "Beltline Parkway" plan was undeniably an improvement over the stripped-down urban freeways being built throughout the country during the 1950s, but its picturesque plantings and charming lakes did not sway the project's chief opponents, who staunchly maintained that any form of high-speed motorway development was incompatible with the scenic preservation and recreational purposes for which Rock Creek Park was originally created. U. S. Grant III pointed to the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as evidence that "fast moving traffic and outdoor recreation are just incompatible." Grant had played an important role in the parkway's development in the 1920s and 1930s. While he was still proud of the job he and Olmsted had done in restoring the polluted portions of the lower valley and preserving it from urban development, he noted that the project had not worked out entirely as planned. The parkway's commuter function had overshadowed all other uses so that its intended role as a multi-purpose public park was never fully realized. Grant ridiculed the assertion that high-speed parkway construction would make the secluded portions of Rock Creek Park more accessible to a greater

²³² "Development Plans for Rock Creek Park Units 2 and 3"; Wes Bartholomew, "Model Used to Urge Plan for Belt Road," Washington Post, 7 July 1954.

majority of citizens. While it was true that motorists would be able to catch fleeting glimpses of the remaining scenery while passing through at 50 or 60 mph, it was unlikely that many would stop to experience the park at a more intimate and desirable distance. If they did, they would be taking their lives in their hands to do so; stopping to enjoy the scenery on modern parkways was such a dangerous practice that it was generally proscribed as unsafe and illegal. Grant was not impressed with the Olmsted Brothers proposal, which he dismissed as "a high speed freeway, dolled out in landscaped clothing." Parks, Grant insisted, were intended as refuges from city sights and the stresses of modern life. Even in the Olmsted Brothers' supposedly more sensitive guise, the proposed development would compromise the desired effect because its high-speed roadways would introduce the very elements that parks were intended to counteract, such as "the danger to persons, lack of safe crossings, the whizz and roar of traffic, the stink of gasoline fumes, and the nervous tension and the sense of still being in the midst of strenuous living." Grant also belittled the value and questioned the sincerity of the M-NCP&PC's public relations efforts, which he characterized as "having the Olmsted Brothers make its pretty picture and model to the sell the project." Grant, at least, suggested that the broader park and recreation aspects of the plan would make a good blue print for the future development of the park, provided the offending motorways were eliminated or drastically revised. Other expressway opponents were even more dismissive of the Olmsted Brothers plan. The attorney for the property owners, who were continuing to pursue their suit against the project, dismissed the landscaping efforts and recreational features as "window dressing" and condemned the Olmsted Brothers' proposal as "probably the most expensive job of camouflaging a highway that's ever been done." The most extreme critics asserted that the Maryland Roads Commission and the M-NCP&PC had no intention of abiding by its scenery-saving principles once the NCPC gave the go ahead for the project.²³³

Cramton also continued to oppose the project, urging the NCPC to reject all efforts to construct a "superspeed highway" in either the Maryland or D.C. section of the park. The former senator underscored that he and his colleagues had intended the Capper-Cramton Act to serve as an instrument for "the preservation and proper utilization of the great scenic advantages of our National Capital" and not as a temporary expedient to reserve land for future freeway development. Cramton underscored that he and his colleagues understood that the Washington metropolitan area would expand rapidly, with much of the growth occurring in the northwest suburbs surrounding the valley of Rock Creek. This was precisely the reason they had considered it essential to secure the creek and its environs from the threat of development, both private and public. At the time, Cramton pointed out, Maryland planners and politicians had agreed with these principals and had eagerly embraced the millions of dollars in federal aid

²³³ Letter, Grant to Senator Murray, 2 March 1955, reprinted in Planning and Civic Comment, (March 1955), 32-34; the expressway opposition's charge that the highway builders had no intention of following the Olmsted Brothers' plan was reported in "Maryland Planners Assail Foes of Park Belt Road," Washington Evening Star, 23 July 1954; attorney J. Joseph Base's comments reported in "Belt Route Ruling Will Be Appealed," Washington Daily News, 28 July 1954.

Congress authorized to acquire the threatened stream valleys and other scenic reservations. Cramton found their recent change of heart distressing, to say the least. Like Grant and several of the other critics, Cramton rejected the argument that the proposed development was really a parkway and not a utilitarian freeway. In addition to questioning the disingenuous "parkway" designation, Cramton took pains to point out that the original legislation had specified that lands bordering Rock Creek were to be set aside as a park, not as a parkway. By 1930 it was clear that parks and parkways were two different sorts of development, one devoted primarily to traffic movement through attractive surroundings and the other to scenic preservation with minimal road development. The Capper-Cramton Act clearly stated that the upper regions of Rock Creek should be devoted to traditional park purposes. "It is not a parkway, and was never intended to be a parkway," Cramton angrily proclaimed. The only roads that should be permitted in the park, Cramton insisted, were those that provided access to recreational facilities. Even these should be kept to a minimum and designed as unobtrusively as possible. Cramton exhorted the NCPC to stand firm against the Maryland development interests and resolve to "close the door with definiteness to any alluring proposals that involve preeminence of highway use in any part of this park."²³⁴

The Rock Creek Park expressway battle continued to rage throughout 1954. The NCPC approved the Olmsted Brothers plan in June, but further enraged Maryland highway interests by attaching conditions designed to prevent the highway engineers from using the beltway segment as a link in U.S. 240. The Maryland highway planners had revised the beltway alignment to loop south out of the Maryland portion of the park between Connecticut Avenue and Kensington Parkway. The NCPC saw this as a transparent attempt to circumvent the commission's earlier rejection of the U.S. 240 extension by enabling the highway engineers to connect the expressway to the beltway outside the park, where the NCPC could not exercise its veto power. The net effect on the D.C. portion of Rock Creek Park would be the same, however, whether U.S. 240 went through Maryland park land or land acquired from private citizens. The NCPC contended it had a right to insist on this prohibition, since everyone knew that if the Maryland Roads Commission constructed U.S. 240 up to the edge of Rock Creek Park, the pressure to continue it through to downtown Washington would be insurmountable. The NCPC's conditional approval infuriated Maryland planning authorities, who asserted that the national commission had no

²³⁴ Letter, Cramton to NCPC, 8 June 1954, reprinted in Planning and Civic Comment, (March 1955). The Audubon Society similarly protested that lands set as parks should not be converted into parkways. In an article pointedly titled "Should Our Capital Have Parks or Parkways?" Washington chapter president Ira Barnes attempted to rally opposition to proposed high-speed parkway developments in Rock Creek Park, Glover-Archbold Park, and the C&O Canal Park. (Irston Barnes, "Shall Our Capital Have Parks or Parkways," Audubon Magazine 56 (March-April 1954): 74-76) Concurrent efforts to extend George Washington Memorial Parkway along the Potomac River were also meeting concerted environmentalist opposition. For accounts of the conflict over motorway development in George Washington Memorial Parkway and along the C&O Canal, see Barry Mackintosh, "Shootout on the Old C&O Canal: The Great Parkway Controversy, 1950-1960," Maryland Historical Magazine 90 (Summer 1995): 141-163; Timothy Davis, "George Washington Memorial Parkway," HAER Report No. VA-69, 161-166, 172-176.

authority to dictate what the state could or could not do on state-owned land. Condemning the NCPC's decision as an "unfortunate and ill-advised attempt to exercise power which it does not possess," M-NCP&PC Chairman Robert M. Watkins warned that the commission's "arbitrary and capricious" behavior threatened to scuttle the entire circumferential beltway project and poison regional planning efforts throughout the Washington area. Watkins proclaimed that it was time for Maryland officials to revolt against the untenable restrictions imposed by the Capper-Cramton Act. According to Watkins, the NCPC's obstructionist behavior demonstrated that the state should never have given up "one iota of sovereignty to the Federal Government in exchange for a puny appropriation that would in turn give a bureau of the Federal Government" control of park land and road construction issues in Maryland. Watkins also repeated the argument that constructing an expressway through Rock Creek Park would benefit a far larger portion of the public than currently used it by making its natural beauties accessible to local motorists and long-distance travelers. McCain sent a terse telegram to the NCPC asserting that the Maryland Roads Commission had no intention of abiding by the federal planners' restrictions. The Star sided with pro-expressway forces, condemning the NCPC for doing a "somersault" on the U.S. 240 extension. The Star portrayed the Maryland and D.C. highway departments as "victims" of the NCPC's irrational obstructionism and asserted that the commission's inconsistent and overly cautious behavior was holding up vital highway construction projects throughout the Washington metropolitan region. The accusation that the NCPC had reversed its course stemmed from the fact that the commission had not thought to express its objections to the construction of a U.S. 240 extension outside Rock Creek Park, even though its opposition to the scheme's underlying intent was abundantly clear. While Watkins' most acrimonious accusations undoubtedly reflected calculated political grandstanding geared toward turning popular opinion against the NCPC, Maryland officials appear to have been genuinely surprised by the NCPC's decision. In a confidential letter to Olmsted Brothers reporting the results of the NCPC's review, M-NCP&PC General Counsel J. Bond Smith maintained that he had had "no intimation" that the national commission would reject the revised plan. Smith accused the NCPC of improperly concealing its intentions and blind-siding the highway planners by attaching conditions that the commissioners "had no legal right to do and no moral right in view of their long delay and acquiescence." NCPC Chairman Bartholomew defended his commission's integrity, underscoring that the commission continued to endorse the concept of using a small section of Rock Creek Park for a circumferential highway, but pointing out that the new location raised suspicions that Maryland officials intended the proposed roadway to function as part of a radial thoroughfare and not as a "true distributor route." The NCPC's opposition to the development of a major radial traffic artery through Rock Creek Park was well-known, Bartholomew maintained, so the highway interests could hardly claim to be surprised by the conditions attached to the commission's approval.²³⁵

²³⁵ Wes Barthelmes, "Plan for Park Leg of Rt. 240 Blocked by NCPC," Washington Post, 11 June 1954; "Another Highway Squabble," (editorial) Washington Sunday Star 13 June 1954; Wes Barthelmes, "Belt Route 'Strings' Called Ill-Advised," Washington Post, 17 June 1954; "Maryland Planners Blast Capital Group in Belt Road

The NCPC's conditional approval of the beltway proposal generated comparable complaints from the other side of the debate. Conservation groups continued to express their opposition to the beltway segment and condemned the agency for sacrificing any park land at all to the insatiable demands of highway builders. The neighboring property owners' suit against the NCPC for violating the Capper-Cramton Act proceeded through the judicial process, overcoming the government's plea for a summary dismissal to expedite the development process. The suit made three principal claims: first, the appellants contended that the proposed development was not a true parkway, as its supporters claimed, but an expressway, and thus flagrantly incompatible with the congressionally mandated purposes for which Rock Creek Park and its Maryland extension had been created; second, the claimants asserted that, since the type of development proposed by the Maryland Roads Commission was not envisioned in the 1930 Capper-Cramton Act, the NCPC was violating the provisions of that act by approving it; any substantial deviation from the original mandate, opponents insisted, would have to be approved by another act of Congress; finally, the homeowners asserted that the highway construction would deal a devastating blow to their property values, since they had paid premium prices based on their lots' proximity to Rock Creek Park and the assurance that it would continue to be preserved as public park land. The claimants understandably de-emphasized this last consideration and focused the debate on the question of whether or not the proposed development constituted a parkway in the accepted use of the term. The NCPC and Maryland highway interests insisted that it did, pointing to the scenic and recreational amenities of the Olmsted Brothers plan and mustering various supportive interpretations of the term parkway as it was then understood by contemporary planning professionals. The NCPC's counsel, Assistant U.S. Attorney Oliver Gasch, maintained that the current definition of the word parkway implied a road that conformed to the natural terrain as much as possible, that provided a means for motorists to enter a park, and from which commercial vehicles such as trucks and buses were prohibited. "A parkway is a roadway that is landscaped and has a belt of trees and growth on either side to screen it from the park," Gasch proclaimed, "that's the essential difference between a parkway and a naked highway." Gasch's definition left the door open to a wide variety of treatments, from the intimate pastoral landscape of Blue Ridge Parkway to the stripped-down environs of many contemporary expressways. Painting the opposition as archaic obstructionists he exclaimed, "It's not limited to a little meandering road leading into a picnic ground." The claimants' attorney, J. Joseph Base, countered that the NCPC was being disingenuous by calling the proposed development a parkway and contending that the term parkway had become so broadly used as to be virtually meaningless. The only way to tell a parkway from a freeway was

Dispute," Washington Evening Star, 25 June 1954; Bartholomew quoted in "Belt Suit Dismissal Plea Set for July 15," Washington Evening Star, 17 June 1954; telegram, McCain to NCPC, 11 June 1954, Maryland Roads Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives; Smith kept the Olmsted Brothers firm abreast of the controversy, sending news items and clippings along with complaints about the NCPC's rulings and the ongoing lawsuit; letter, Smith to Edward Whiting, Olmsted Brothers, 10 June, 1954; Smith to Whiting, 14 June 1954 (quoted); Smith to Whiting, 17 June, 1954, Olmsted Post-1949 Correspondence Collection, Job #9970 Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission; National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

to look at its design and intended uses. Dismissing the Olmsted Brothers' pretty trees and lakes as "window dressing to make this highway fall into some classification of parkway," Base insisted that roadway's basic configuration and the stated intentions of regional highway officials left "no question" that the proposed development was a highway and not a parkway. Base assailed the Olmsted Brothers' elaborate plan as "probably the most expensive job of camouflaging a highway that's ever been done." Edward Northrop, the property owners' second attorney, echoed Base's inflated rhetoric, condemning the proposed expressway as the "opening wedge in the destruction of our park system." Despite these impassioned arguments, District Judge Edward Tamm dismissed the case in July 1954, ruling that the NCPC had the right to determine the appropriate level of road development in parks under its jurisdiction. The plaintiffs vowed to appeal the ruling, however, setting the stage for another round of acrimonious debates.²³⁶

The next round of the Rock Creek Park expressway battle was fought not just in court and in the local papers but in the halls of Congress as well. As the property owners pursued their case in the U.S. Court of Appeals, the growing public furor and effective lobbying by conservation organizations and citizens' groups brought Congress into the fray in early 1955. Montana Senator James Murray, chairman of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, introduced legislation on behalf of expressway opponents. Murray's resolution forbade the construction of new roads in the District of Columbia portion of Rock Creek Park without congressional authorization and called for the NCPC to reconsider its approval of the disputed beltway segment. Murray's proposal explicitly prohibited expressway construction along the longitudinal access of the park, but held the door open for completion of the beltway by stipulating that permission might be granted for a circumferential expressway cutting directly across the park by the most direct means. Public hearings on the matter were held in February 1955, with heated commentary coming from both sides. NPS Director Conrad Wirth and representatives of various conservation organizations assailed the proposed construction, while highway promoters praised the "Beltline Parkway" plan and blasted their opponents for selfishly trying to restrict access to public park land to the fortunate few who could afford adjoining property in exclusive Chevy Chase. Maryland senators Butler and Beall cast the beltway development as essential for the continued growth and well-being of the region. The M-NCP&PC and the D.C. Board of the Commissioners echoed this point of view, while Maryland State Roads Commission Chairman McCain continued to advocate the project and castigate its opponents in no uncertain terms. NCPC Chairman Harland Bartholomew and the Olmsted

²³⁶ "Gasch Chosen to Defend in Parkway Suit," Washington Post, 23 December 1953; "Court Denies Motion to Throw Out Suit," Washington Evening Star, 3 May 1954; "Definite Dates Sought for Arguments on Rock Creek Route," Washington Evening Star, 12 July 1954; "Belt Suit Dismissal Plea Set for July 15," Washington Evening Star, 17 June 1954; "Maryland Planners Again Assail Foes of Park Belt Road," Washington Sunday Star, 23 July 1954; "Judge Tamm Throws Rock Creek Belt Suit," Washington Post, 28 July 1954; George Beveridge, "Appeal Planned With Dismissal of Parkway Suit," Washington Evening Star, 28 July 1954; Cordelia Ruffin, "Belt Route Ruling Will Be Appealed," Washington Daily News, 28 July 1954.

Brothers' Edward Whiting emphasized the project's park-like amenities and argued that the small sacrifice in park land was a small price to pay for reducing the threat to the main portion of Rock Creek Park by substituting a circumferential traffic distributor for the vastly more destructive radial expressway proposal. One of the most ironic results of the ongoing debate was that the NCPC found itself grouped with the Maryland Roads Commission and the M-NCPC as a target of wrath from hard-line expressway opponents, who continued to reject the beltway compromise in any way, shape, or form. Among the nationally known conservationists testifying against the project were Sierra Club President David Brower, Wilderness Society Executive Director Howard Zahniser, National Parks Association Executive Director Fred Packard, American Planning and Civic Association President U.S. Grant III, and former American Planning and Civic Association Secretary Harlean James. Nye and other local citizens' group leaders also testified in favor of Murray's resolution. NCPC Chairman Harland Bartholomew defended the agency's compromise approach, praising "modern parkways" such as the proposed beltway segment as a "new form of public park use" that produced a desirable synthesis of modern-day efficiency and traditional park values. According to Bartholomew, such parkways enabled large numbers of people to "enjoy some of their daily travel trips amid more pleasant surroundings than something built exclusively of roadway surface and retaining walls." Invoking the Westchester County paradigm he had previously rejected as inapplicable to the Rock Creek Park issue, Bartholomew contended, "The modern parkway possesses certain park-like characteristics with greater enjoyment of views, withdrawal from ugly surroundings, the presence of green trees, turf, and flowering shrubs, and the relative coolness of shade while driving." While Bartholomew promoted parkway development in outlying suburban areas such as the Maryland extension of Rock Creek Park, he drew the line at condoning similar construction in existing urban parks such as New York's Central Park or the D.C. section of Rock Creek Park. "These large natural park areas should not be invaded by any modern traffic-way, even under the guise of the term 'parkway' or 'expressway,'" Bartholomew insisted, assuring that the NCPC would "consistently oppose any such invasion."²³⁷

Once again, the results of these debates were inconclusive. Murray closed the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs hearings with the time-tested equivocation tactic of recommending that the matter receive further study. The U.S. Court of Appeals vacated Judge Tamm's decision in favor of the NCPC, but dismissed the property owners' suit on jurisdictional issues, ruling that the matter should be pursued in the Maryland courts, which the appellants assured they would do. A legal opinion prepared by NCPC General Counsel William S. Cheatham and released in March 1955 cast further doubt on the expressway proponents' claims

²³⁷ Richard Lyons "Belt Route Called 'Park Destruction,'" Washington Post, 27 February 1955; George Beveridge, "Belt Highway Ends in Row on Rights," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1955; S.J. Resolution 36 "For the Preservation of Rock Creek Park," 84th Cong., 1st Sess., 1955; "Preservation of Rock Creek," Congressional Record Daily Digest, 25 February 1955, p. D136; "Preservation of Rock Creek," Congressional Record Daily Digest, 28 February 1955, p. D142; Bartholomew statement before Senate Interior Committee hearing on S.J. Resolution 36, in U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

that both the beltway and the proposed U.S. 240 extension were compatible with legislative guidelines for the development of Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Cheatham noted that the early congressional reports on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway characterized the main motorway as an extension of the existing drives in Rock Creek Park and emphasized the project's role as a park for the surrounding neighborhoods. Since the 1890 legislation creating Rock Creek Park linked the construction of park drives with the establishment of foot and bridle paths, Cheatham asserted that Congress had clearly intended for the park roads to be devoted to recreational purposes. According to Cheatham, the legislative mandate to facilitate driving in the park implied leisurely recreational driving, in which visitors would "drive slowly to enjoy the park or to go to a particular place in the park," and not, as expressway promoters claimed, to enable latter-day motorists "to drive on a main roadway such as a heavily traveled city street or state highway." The Evening Star voiced its exasperation with expressway opponents, calling for an end to obstructionist litigation and insisting that Congress "face the fact" that the extension of U.S. 240 through both the Maryland and D.C. portions of Rock Creek was necessary and inevitable. Conservationists, in turn, criticized the press for taking the pro-development "board of trade" point of view and not considering the broader social and environmental implications of sacrificing park land for highway construction. The American Automobile Association, meanwhile, warned that road building was not keeping up with the growth in automobile sales and proclaimed that America need more and better highways. Maryland highway officials ignored the legal uncertainties and began construction on the disputed beltway segment under a conditional agreement with the NCPC. Expressway opponents rallied support by organizing a "Rock Creek Park Day" designed to focus attention on the park's aesthetic and recreational importance to the national capital region. Orchestrated by Grant with the cooperation of the National Park Service and the assistance of over 50 local conservation and recreation groups, the event drew thousands of picnickers to the park on May 15, 1955 and attracted considerable favorable press coverage. The local papers conspicuously withheld judgement on the expressway issue, but went to great lengths to praise Rock Creek Park as an unsurpassed urban amenity.²³⁸

The highway interests appear to have been temporarily chastened by this show of

²³⁸ Richard Lyons, "Belt Route Called 'Park Destruction,'" Washington Post, 27 February 1955; George Beveridge, "Belt Highway Ends in Row on Rights," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1955; David Stephens et al v. Harland Bartholomew et al, Appeal from the United States District Court of the District of Columbia, No. 12365, decided 28 April 1955; Wes Barthelmes, "Foes of Belt Told to Sue In Maryland," Washington Post, 29 April 1955; William S. Cheatham, NCPC General Counsel, "Legal Opinion: Inner County Belt Route Rock Creek Park," March 1955 in NCPC Maryland Roads Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; "Shooting at a Formless Target," editorial, Washington Evening Star, 1 March 1955; "Still Up in the Air," editorial, Washington Evening Star, 30 April 1955; conservationist criticism of the press and the AAA comments appeared in "Planner Blisters Idea of Pike Through Park," Washington Evening Star, 27 May 1955; "'Rock Creek Day' to Stress Facilities of 'Finest Parks,'" Washington Evening Star, 27 March 1955; "Rock Creek Day," editorial, Washington Post, 15 May 1955; Don Oleson, "Thousands Enjoy Outdoors on Rock Creek Park Day," Washington Post, 16 May 1955.

support, but two years later, the Maryland Roads Commission, the M-NCPC, and the Montgomery County Council were again pushing to resurrect the U.S. 240 proposal. This time, the Washington Post editorialized forcefully against the project, admitting it had erred in endorsing earlier calls for expressway construction within Rock Creek Park. "This would be intolerable," the Post now proclaimed, advising that "Washingtonians who love their park had better rise up and block any such encroachment." The Post registered its opposition to expressway construction in Rock Creek Park and along the C & O Canal, but endorsed the highway planners' concomitant proposal to run their long-sought radial thoroughfare through Glover-Archbold Park. The newspaper acknowledged that some sort of express connection between the beltway and downtown Washington was necessary and maintained that the route through Glover-Archbold Park represented the least objectionable alternative given that the relatively narrow and lightly used park was clearly not as irreplaceable as its larger and more popular neighbors. Senator Murray submitted another resolution opposing highway development in Rock Creek Park and inserted the Post's editorial in the Congressional Record. While Murray's resolution was never put to a full Senate vote, the concerted opposition to further road development in Rock Creek Park convinced the Maryland Roads Commission and the M-NCP&PC to back off from the more contentious U.S. 240 extension project for the time being and concentrate on establishing the cross-park beltway segment ²³⁹

The Evening Star had long insisted that it was inconsistent for the NPS to oppose the beltway and the U.S. 240 extension when the agency was undertaking to upgrade the park roadway between Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Piney Branch to modern express parkway standards. "If the park is not destroyed by a highway planned by Interior Department," the newspaper had editorialized, "the park is not destroyed when the highway is planned and built by the roads commission or the highway department." Subsequent events quickly proved that the Star's contention that "properly landscaped highways or parkways do not 'destroy' park areas" was a dubious assertion, at best, and that the National Park Service and the Maryland Roads Commission had significantly different opinions about what constituted "proper" highway landscaping. As beltway opponents had long maintained, the highway interests' contention that the completed project would look and function like a traditional parkway was a charade. The initial segment between Wisconsin and Connecticut Avenues was initially constructed as a winding four-lane roadway with modest landscape improvements and traditional rustic parkway signage; but McCain had insisted that its parkway-like 30' grassy median be graded in such a way that it could easily be converted into additional traffic lanes in the event that--sometime in the distant future, it was implied--highway engineers determined it was necessary to convert the four-lane parkway into a six-lane, 200'- wide expressway. The distant future arrived in December 1961, when the Maryland Roads Commission asserted that it was time to suspend the prohibition on commercial traffic and accept the inevitable conclusion that the cross-park

²³⁹ "Highway Keep Out," editorial, Washington Post, 12 July 1957; Congressional Record-Senate, 16 July 1957, 10651.

beltway section would have to be constructed to modern expressway standards. The original agreement was no longer tenable, the Maryland Roads Commission maintained, not just for reasons of safety and efficiency, but because the Beltway could not be included in the interstate highway system unless it met modern design standards and accommodated both private and commercial traffic. McCain's successor, John Funk, warned that failure to adopt interstate highway standards would make it virtually impossible to obtain funding to complete the roadway from Connecticut Avenue to Forest Glen. Even if funding to continue the existing roadway according to parkway standards could be obtained from the park service or other sympathetic source, it would still be necessary to construct a parallel expressway to avoid creating an unacceptable disruption in the interstate highway system. This would cause the loss of far more park land than was contemplated in the commission's plans for upgrading the beltway along the existing alignment. There was little the NPS or NCPC could do to refute these arguments. As the Post and the Star pointed out, the agencies had been complicit in sustaining the "parkway fiction" from the start, knowing full well that it was unrealistic to expect that beltway traffic could be kept out of the park. Ridiculing the park service's "pious promises," in an editorial pointedly titled "Reality Breaks Through," the Washington Post observed, "surely there is no one who really believed that trucks and buses would roar over every other mile of the Beltway, only to vanish from this charmed section." The planning agencies could hardly cry foul, the Post pointed out, when they had acquiesced to the road commission's demands and quietly agreed to construct the roadbed with sufficient strength to accommodate heavy trucks. The Evening Star similarly accused local planners of intentionally "ducking" this "politically explosive" issue, even though it was evident to all observers that the cross-park segment would have to function as a fully operable component of the Capital Beltway. When the beltway was completed during the mid 1960s, all previous prohibitions were set aside and the road was constructed to Interstate Highway standards. Impact on the park was minimized to some degree by locating the highway along the park's southern border and cutting directly across parkland only in a short section near Forest Glen.²⁴⁰

Several attempts were made during the 1960s to revive the idea of a full-fledged express route from the beltway through Rock Creek Park to downtown Washington. When the National Park Service and its allies successfully fought off attempts on the part of regional highway planners to secure permission to construct a major radial artery along the Potomac River or through Glover-Archbold Park, pro-expressway and pro-development forces insisted it was necessary to go back to the original concept of constructing a highway along the west side of Rock Creek Park. The Evening Star supported this proposal, resurrecting the argument that the proposed construction would affect only a small portion of the park and that it would actually

²⁴⁰ "'Destroying' Rock Creek Park," editorial, Washington Evening Star, 13 August 1953; Letter, McCain to Bartholomew, 28 October 1953; in U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives; "Reality Breaks Through," editorial, Washington Post, 20 December 1961; "Beltway in the Park," Washington Evening Star, 5 December 1961.

have a positive effect by making the attractive scenery of the least-used section of the park accessible to thousands more people than presently used it. "There is something wrong with the concept that such a park in the middle of a teeming city should be enjoyed only by those who are willing to walk through it," the Star editorialized, pointing to the recently opened sections of George Washington Memorial Parkway in Fairfax County, Virginia as proof that it was "possible and desirable to enhance the value of park areas by careful highway designing." Park supporters immediately contested the Star's assertions. One irate correspondent castigated the paper for its "naively incredulous remark that building an expressway through Rock Creek Park would 'open the beauties of this lovely park every day to thousands of people who never get near it.'" Pointing out that the road in question was intended to function as a high-speed utilitarian traffic artery, the writer declaimed, "Have you ever observed any nature-lovers on the New Jersey Turnpike?" Accurately predicting demographic trends that would markedly transform the District of Columbia, expressway opponents warned that constructing additional freeways to facilitate the commuter lifestyle would create an exodus of middle and upper-class citizens to the suburbs and a concomitant decline in city tax revenues and urban vitality. Public opinion was by no means universally opposed to the revived expressway proposal, however. One of the more unusual justifications for the proposed expressway construction was that a heavily-used, well-lighted highway would make the park safer. Complaining that urban parks throughout the country were becoming too dangerous for ordinary citizens to enjoy on foot, one Star subscriber asserted that "the safest way to go through Rock Creek Park, particularly after dark, is in an automobile." If Congress failed to support the newest expressway proposal, this writer claimed, it might be necessary to engage the Marine Corps to police Rock Creek Park.²⁴¹

Nothing came of these proposals, but the expressway threat resurfaced again in 1966 when the Lands Committee of the Metropolitan Council of Governments and the National Capital Regional Planning Council advocated restudying the highway route along the west side of the park. This proposal stemmed from a December 1965 meeting of the Montgomery County Planning Board, where concerns were again raised that inadequate highway facilities were retarding suburban development and making commuting miserable for Montgomery County residents. The Metropolitan Council of Governments transmitted the proposal to the NCPC without endorsing its contents. The Evening Star again editorialized in favor of the renewed proposal, criticizing the shortsightedness of earlier expressway opponents and praising the proposed roadway as "the most reasonable, logical solution" to pressing transportation needs. The Maryland Roads Commission also lobbied for the proposal, shifting the proposed roadway to the east side of the park to eliminate the controversial intrusion into the secluded northwest section and presenting the project as an alternative to the hotly debated north-central freeway, which was slated to uproot hundreds of homeowners. An expressway running along Sixteenth

²⁴¹ "Back to Rock Creek," editorial, Washington Evening Star, 30 October 1963; "Objection Noted," letter from Leonard Ware to the editor, Washington Evening Star, 1 November 1963; "Park Expressway," letter from Lee Somers to the editor, Washington Evening Star.

Street and then cutting down Colorado Avenue into Rock Creek Park and on to the zoo tunnel, the roads commission claimed, would cause minimal disruption while offering motorists "a monumental scenic green entry to the nation's capital." Local business leaders also backed the Rock Creek Park expressway along with other freeway proposals, insisting that improved access to downtown Washington was needed to combat the loss of revenues to suburban development. The re-emergence of the expressway threat precipitated a storm of protest in the letters-to-the-editors sections of the Washington Post and the Washington Evening Star. Many of these letters recounted earlier rejections of similar expressway proposals and underscored the continued public resistance to converting Rock Creek Park into a major traffic thoroughfare. The NCPC was equally unsympathetic to the renewed expressway proposal, which died a silent death as planning agencies increasingly focused on rapid transit as the most desirable means of solving metropolitan Washington's chronic commuting problem.²⁴²

The first study of Washington's transportation needs conducted by a comprehensive planning agency rather than by highway engineers was the Mass Transportation Survey of 1955-1957, which was sponsored jointly by the NCPC and the National Capital Regional Planning Council. The \$400,000 study concluded that surface-transportation improvements would never keep pace with projected population growth. The attempt to solve the District's transportation problems through expressway construction alone would end up strangling the capital in a web of beltways and radial highways ranging in width from four to twenty-six lanes. In 1960 Congress passed the National Capital Planning Act, which called for a renewed investigation of the District's traffic needs, this time with equal emphasis on the development of mass transit. The ascendancy of anti-expressway community activist Elizabeth Rowe to the chair of the NCPC in 1962 represented another blow to the District Highway Department's dreams of a completed system of inner and outer beltways. While it was too late to prevent the inundation of a major portion of West Potomac Park and the bottom end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway under a maze of bridge abutments and access ramps, the pressure to upgrade the parkway to expressway standards or insert various freeway segments in and around the parkway abated significantly in the mid 1960s. The District Commissioners made one last attempt to implement the Inner Loop and related in projects in 1966. This initiative was supported by the District Highway Department and the pro-development Federal City Council, but opposed by citizens groups and the Commission of Fine Arts. The city engaged the consulting firm Arthur D. Little to conduct a study aimed at resolving the deadlock and settling the freeway question once and for all. To the District Commissioners' consternation, the Little report asserted that the highway department's plans were "based on insufficient data, and on questionable assumptions, and forecasting

²⁴² "Rock Creek Freeway Proposal is Revived," Washington Post, 15 April 1966; "Suburbs Ask Restudy of Park Freeway Plan," Washington Evening Star, 15 April 1966; "Back to the Park" (editorial), Washington Evening Star, 19 April 1966; Jack Eisen, "Rock Creek Park Freeway Revived," Washington Post, 5 December 1968; "Threat to Parks," letter from James Deane, Associate Editor, National Parks Magazine to editor, Washington Post, 13 December 1968; "Protecting the Park," letter from Elting Arnold, Audubon Naturalist Society to editor, Washington Post, 3 January 1969.

techniques." Ruling that the previous highway studies had "been carried out with inadequate regard for long range economic and social impact," the Little report recommended a moratorium on new freeway construction in the District.²⁴³

Major Park Road Improvements, 1945-1965

While the NPS steadfastly opposed major expressway construction in Rock Creek Park, the agency undertook a concerted campaign to upgrade the internal park road system during the 1950s. The park service's primary challenge was to renovate Beach Drive to accommodate heavier traffic loads without sacrificing its scenic qualities and historic integrity. Earlier plans to widen and straighten Beach Drive to serve as an extension of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as far north as Colorado Avenue were abandoned in 1954, due in part to the Smithsonian's continued opposition to the zoo tunnel but also to concerns that extending the parkway into the park would compromise the campaign to keep the U.S. 240 proposal at bay. Constructing a four-lane commuter parkway through the bottom third of the park would make the argument for a through-connection to U.S. 240 even more enticing while adding fuel to the pro-expressway forces' argument that high-speed roadways could be successfully integrated into the park setting. The park service did not want to appear to be completely obstructionist, however. Improving the Beach Drive's established function as a de facto commuter artery by making the roadway safer, more efficient, and more comfortable to drive would garner good will in the public relations battle while reducing the pressure to construct the U.S. 240 extension. Recognizing that it was impossible to significantly widen or straighten Beach Drive without seriously compromising the park experience, the NPS embarked on a more modest renovation program that included replacing the rapidly deteriorating old roadbed with a subgrade and pavement designed to accommodate modern automobiles rather than horses and buggies, reducing some of the sharpest curves, rebuilding outdated bridges, bypassing the remaining fords, and replacing traditional open gutters with drop-inlets, an underground drainage system, and mountable concrete curbs. Most of the original goose-neck iron lighting standards were also replaced by utilitarian modern fixtures. The NPS spent \$559,000 on these improvements between 1951 and 1955, with another \$1 million devoted to bridge projects and related construction between 1956 and 1960. The latter phase was funded by the NPS's Mission 66 program, a \$1 billion ten-year construction effort designed to upgrade the National Park System to accommodate the postwar surge in park attendance by motorized visitors.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 261-262, 291-293; Helen Leavitt, SuperHighway-Superhoax (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 92-109; Little report quoted in Leavitt, Superhighway-Superhoax, 92; Federal City Council, Freeways in the National Capital Region (Washington, D.C.: Federal City Council, 1966).

²⁴⁴ The NPS's reasons for abandoning the plan to extend Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to Colorado Avenue were detailed in "Shut Park Span Irks Motorists," Washington Post, 19 May 1957. These 1950s construction projects were detailed in "2 Projects to Complete Rock Creek Park Series," Washington Evening Star, 19 August 1955; "Park's Beach Drive Open From Zoo to Maryland," Washington Sunday Star, 29 April 1956; "Four Rock Creek Spans Costing \$1 Million Begun," Washington Evening Star, 31 March 1957; "Motorists Toughened by

The road renovation project proceeded in stages as the NPS tried to minimize traffic disruptions by conducting the work on discrete sections between intersecting roadways. The first section of Beach Drive to be upgraded was the one-half mile stretch between Porter Street and Klinge Road, which was completed in 1951, along with the interchange and overpass for Tilden Street. The improvement of Beach Drive from Tilden Street to Blagden Avenue was completed in July 1955. A large parking lot was constructed near Park Road at this time. The next big project was the reconstruction of the Beach Drive/Military Road intersection to incorporate a new drainage system designed to combat the flash-flooding that periodically inundated the area and caused serious traffic problems. A new concrete culvert was constructed diagonally underneath the intersection to accommodate flash flood waters from the normally dry creek bed that paralleled Military Road on the east slope of the park. The utilitarian concrete structure was encased within an attractive stone-faced veneer to harmonize with the park's other rustic stream-crossings. This traditional treatment was somewhat unusual by this time. The NPS had adopted a more modern, minimally adorned functionalist style for most bridge and grade separation construction by the early 1950s, as witnessed by the series of spare reinforced concrete structures erected at Tilden Street, Harvard Street, Piney Branch, Sherrill Drive, Kalmia Road, Glover Road, and Blagden Avenue. The pre-World War II Military Road Bridge over Rock Creek just west of the Beach Drive culvert was a contrasting hybrid of modern technology and traditional aesthetics, consisting of a reinforced concrete substructure decorated with a formal ornamental balustrade of cast concrete. The Military Road/Beach Drive intersection culvert was completed by the end of the summer of 1955, at a cost of \$72,000. The road bed was also raised 4' at this time to further reduce the risk of flooding during bad weather. This portion of Military Road was bypassed and became part of Rock Creek Park's internal circulation system in the late 1950s when the D.C. Highway Department widened and straightened Military Road to make it function more efficiently as a cross-town thoroughfare. Contractors working for the NPS also upgraded a fourth-fifths-of-a-mile-long section of Beach Drive north of Military Road during 1955. This \$67,000 project included the usual drainage and roadbed improvements along with the construction of two large paved parking areas designed to accommodate cars from patrons using the adjacent picnic grounds. In October, contractors began modernizing the 1.6 mile-long section of Beach Drive between Broad Branch Road and Military Road. Approximately \$170,000 was allotted to this project, which forced motorists to take a roundabout detour over Glover Road and Ross Drive. When this project was completed in April 1956 the NPS turned its attention to revising the intersections and stream-crossings at the confluence of Broad Branch and Rock Creek. A modern prestressed concrete girder bridge with stone-veneered abutments and steel railings replaced the old ford that previously crossed Rock Creek just north of Blagden Avenue. A similarly bland modern concrete girder span replaced the charismatic "Pebble Dash" Bridge that had carried Beach Drive over Broad Branch since 1902, which was deemed too

Tangles In Rock Creek Face Tougher Ones," Washington Evening Star, 7 July 1957. For overviews of the Mission 66 program and its impact on the built environment of the national parks, see William C. Everhart, The National Park Service, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 34-37; and Linda McClelland, Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 462-474.

narrow for modern traffic demands. The lower end of Glover Road was rerouted as part of this project. Instead of entering Beach Drive directly just north of the confluence of Rock Creek and Broad Branch, Glover Road was shifted to intersect with Broad Branch Road, crossing the narrower stream on a short concrete and steel bridge. Replacing the old, narrow, and rickety timber bridge that enabled motorists to bypass Milkhouse Ford was next on the agenda. The new bridge was a simple prestressed concrete girder structure with a reinforced concrete deck and aluminum railings; stone veneer was limited to the reinforced concrete abutments and was more regularly cut and laid than on the older, more rustic park bridges. The cost of the bridge and associated improvements to Beach Drive was approximately \$195,000. The project was completed in the summer of 1957. Work on the segment of Beach Drive between Bingham Drive and Kalmia Road began in fall 1956. The old roadway was torn up and replaced with more substantial pavement, mountable concrete curbs and underground drainage were installed, and a prestressed concrete girder bridge was constructed to carry Kalmia Road across Rock Creek to its junction with Beach Drive, at a cost of approximately \$148,000. The bridge was completed at the beginning of July 1957 and was similar to the Milkhouse Ford Bridge in design and minimalistic ornamentation. The northernmost section of Beach Drive, between Wise Road and the District line, was resurfaced and modestly realigned during the fall. The heavily rusticated concrete arch bridge carrying Beach Drive over Branch was replaced with continuous concrete slab span with aluminum railings between 1957 and 1959. The intersection between Beach Drive and Piney Branch Parkway was slightly reconfigured at this time to reduce the sharp angle between the two roadways and provide additional space for turning and merging. The old military truss bridge on Sherrill Drive was finally replaced with a modern structure in 1959. Sherrill Drive from Sixteenth Street was modernized and improved at the same time, though its curves remained exceedingly sharp by conventional highway design standards. Similar in style to the other Mission 66 bridges in Rock Creek Park, the new Sherrill Drive Bridge was a modest prestressed concrete girder span with aluminum railings and reinforced concrete abutments and wingwalls that were faced with a horizontally coursed gneiss stone veneer. The new bridge was formally opened on May 15, 1959. Total cost for the bridge replacement and associated roadway improvements was approximately \$198,000. The project was undertaken by the General Excavating Company of Beltsville, Maryland.²⁴⁵

The most radical change to Rock Creek Park's road system during the 1950s was the transformation of Military Road from a narrow, winding, two-lane, park-like road into a high-

²⁴⁵ "2 Projects to Complete Rock Creek Park Series," Washington Evening Star, 19 August 1955; "Park's Beach Drive Open From Zoo to Maryland," Washington Sunday Star, 29 April 1956; "Four Rock Creek Spans Costing \$1 Million Begun," Washington Evening Star, 31 March 1957; "Motorists Toughened by Tangles In Rock Creek Face Tougher Ones," Washington Evening Star, 7 July 1957; "2d Project Planned for Rock Creek," Washington Post, 4 July 1957; "New Rock Creek Bridge Opened," Washington Post, 15 May 1959. Structural details of these bridges and dates for the Piney Branch Bridge replacement is from Federal Highway Administration's 1988 Engineering Study Rock Creek Park (Arlington, Virginia: Federal Highway Administration Eastern District Federal Division, 1988).

speed thoroughfare between 1958-1960. Park officials had long recognized the need to accommodate cross-town traffic and thus voiced few objections when the D.C. Highway Department announced its intention to upgrade the roadway, which was officially part of the city's street system and not an NPS-administered road. The 1918 Olmsted Report had foreseen the need for one or more major cross-park arteries and even suggested that they might be carried on soaring viaducts that would loom above the tree-tops from one side of Rock Creek valley to the other. A number of variations on this theme were proposed throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The D.C. Highway Departments' plan was nowhere near as extravagant or as destructive of park scenery as the major viaduct proposals, but it dramatically changed the character of Military Road by straightening out its curves, expanding it into a four-lane divided highway, raising the travel speed, and isolating it from the park's internal circulation system with an extensive grade separation structure. The construction occurred at a broad and relatively forgiving section of the park, however, and the sacrifice in park values was offset by the advantage gained by relieving the internal park roads from the burden of cross-town traffic. The Military Road upgrade required the construction of a new interchange where Ross Drive and the bypassed section of Military Road intersected with the new roadway. Two new grade separation structures were required to carry the four-lane roadway over Beach Drive and Joyce Road. These structures had steel or precast concrete girder spans and gneiss-faced reinforced concrete piers and abutments in keeping with the other new bridges in the park. A short access drive was also constructed to provide a connection between Joyce Road and Military Road. East of Rock Creek Park, where Military Road became Missouri Avenue, a more traditional masonry-faced rigid-frame concrete arch grade-separation structure was built to carry Sixteenth Street over the new roadway. The Military Road project cost the D.C. Highway Department approximately \$3.3 million and was completed in 1960.²⁴⁶

While the NPS accommodated the D.C. Highway Department's desire to upgrade Military Road into a high-speed traffic artery and devoted considerable resources of its own to improving the safety and efficiency of Beach Drive, the agency found it impossible to accommodate all the demands placed on the park road system by the ever-increasing population of automobile commuters. Despite the NPS's efforts to reduce the construction program's impact on established commuting patterns, road closures were inevitable. By the mid 1950s motorists and the local press had begun to complain that it seemed like years since Beach Drive was open from one end to the other. The closure of the old Park Drive Bridge over Piney Branch Parkway created even more controversy. D.C. Highway Department officials closed the old steel-truss viaduct in August 1956, ruling that it was no longer safe for existing traffic loads. This may have been true, but the highway department's underlying agenda was to pressure the NPS into undertaking the proposed transformation of Beach Drive into a high speed parkway

²⁴⁶ "Bridging the Gap," Washington Post, 8 June 1958; "\$3.3 Billion Rock Creek Park Job Nears End," Washington Daily News, 6 February 1959. (The \$3.3 billion figure in the headline appears to be a typographical error, as the text spells out the project's cost as "\$3.3 million.")

between the zoo and Colorado Avenue, a course of action that highway engineers had portrayed as an essential element of the city's general system of highway improvements since the 1940s. Insisting that the proposed parkway development would make the Park Drive Bridge unnecessary, the D.C. Highway Department refused to repair or replace the condemned structure. The NPS, however, had no intention of carrying through with the proposed high-speed parkway project, even though the NCPC had over-ruled NPS objections and endorsed the concept a decade earlier. By the mid 1950s, the NPS had become even more convinced that such roadways were incompatible with traditional park uses. More importantly, the agency feared that extending Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as far into the park as Colorado Avenue would strengthen the highway department's case for extending U.S. 240 down into Rock Creek Park from Maryland. Even without the construction of U.S. 240, NPS planners were convinced that the additional traffic generated by the proposed parkway extension would overload Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, which was already operating close to full capacity. With the zoo tunnel project stalled interminably, moreover, it made no sense to construct a short section of modern roadway leading to an intermittently operating ford. The NPS also claimed it could not afford to undertake the proposed improvements even if it wanted to, having committed all the allotted road construction funds for Rock Creek Park to upgrade Beach Drive and associated bridges. The best solution, according to NPS planners, would be for the D.C. Highway Department either to repair the Park Road Bridge or pay for the construction of an elevated park crossing between Uphur and Tilden streets. D.C. highway engineers countered that the very least the NPS could do would be to build a new low-level crossing near Peirce Mill to facilitate cross-park traffic.²⁴⁷

The NPS and the D.C. Highway Department battled back and forth while the NCPC tried to act as referee. The park service asserted that the highway department was to blame for summarily closing the Park Road Bridge and refusing to repair it, while the highway engineers blamed the NPS for reneging on its purported obligation to upgrade the lower portion of Beach Drive to modern parkway standards. The highway department even accused the NPS of taking funds appropriated for the parkway extension -- which it took to calling the "ghost highway"-- and applying them to general road and bridge repair projects. In the meantime, residents of the surrounding neighborhood and the 7,000 or so motorists who relied on the Park Drive Bridge for their daily commute grew increasingly irate. The Highway Department's public statements together with the fact that the Park Road Bridge was inside Rock Creek Park led many motorists to assume it was the park management's responsibility and caused them to vent frustration at the NPS rather than at the D.C. Highway Department. The press also tended to lay the blame at the

²⁴⁷ "Park's Beach Drive Open From Zoo to Maryland," Washington Sunday Star, 29 April 1956; "Motorists Toughened by Tangles In Rock Creek Face Tougher Ones," Washington Evening Star, 7 July 1957; "City Draws Rebuff on Park Roads Bid," Washington Evening Star, 15 January 1957; "Park Short Cut Is Short Changed," Washington Daily News, 29 January 1957; George Beveridge, "Park Officials Push Uphur Street Span," Washington Evening Star, 2 February 1957; "New Span Asked Over Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 14 February 1957; "Cross-Park Traffic Study Gets 'High Priority' Tag," Washington Evening Star, 28 February 1957; "Shut Park Span Irks Motorists," Washington Post, 19 May 1957.

feet of the NPS, which was being simultaneously accused of delaying and short-circuiting pressing roadway "improvements" throughout the region. The NPS, meanwhile garnered the support of a number of northwest Washington neighborhood groups and citizens associations, which lobbied strenuously to have the old Park Road Bridge repaired or replaced. The D.C. Highway Department eventually gave in and replaced the Park Road Bridge. The proposed Upshur span never garnered significant support. Instead, cross-park traffic was served by an upgraded lower-level link between Porter Street and Klinge Road, which also accommodated motorists using Beach Drive as a means of accessing the surrounding neighborhoods. The NPS successfully withstood the pressure to upgrade the Beach Drive into a high-speed parkway from the zoo to Colorado Avenue, even after the zoo tunnel was opened in 1966.²⁴⁸

Rethinking Rock Creek Park: Accommodating Bicyclists and Forging a New Management Plan, 1966-1998

As the expressway threats faded in the late 1960s, the NPS found itself responding to pressures from the opposite end of the spectrum. Increasingly, the most vociferous interest groups were those seeking to reduce or even eliminate the presence of motorized vehicles in Rock Creek Park. Various management planning initiatives were undertaken to reevaluate the form and function of Rock Creek Park's road system in the face of evolving ideas about what constituted an appropriate balance between practical, recreational, and environmental concerns. The rising popularity of bicycling and the emergence of well-organized bicycling groups were important factors in this process. As bicycling experienced a resurgence of popularity during the 1960s, the NPS sought to accommodate recreational and commuting cyclists without unduly disrupting existing traffic patterns. Beginning a practice that would be greatly expanded over the years, in 1966 the NPS experimented with closing the section of Beach Drive between Joyce Road and Broad Branch on Sunday mornings. Response was not as positive as park service officials had hoped and the experiment was shelved, resurfacing again in 1970 before being temporarily suspended again on the grounds that not enough cyclists were using the park roads to justify closure. The increasing popularity of cycling and other forms of active outdoor recreation soon brought the practice back, however, and in 1972 the Sunday automobile ban became a permanent feature. The Sunday closures were extended to Morrow Drive, as well. At the same time, park forces began building bike trails and converting some equestrian and pedestrian paths to paved "multi-use" trails. In 1971, the cyclist lobby convinced the NPS to experiment with a

²⁴⁸ "City Draws Rebuff on Park Roads Bid," Washington Evening Star, 15 January 1957; "Why Isn't Bridge Rebuilt on Road Through Park," letter from D. Larsen to the editor, Washington Daily News, 18 January 1957; "Are Highwaymen on Wrong Track?" Washington Daily News, 18 January 1957; "Park Short Cut Is Short Changed," Washington Daily News, 29 January 1957; George Beveridge, "Park Officials Push Upshur Street Span," Washington Evening Star, 2 February 1957; "Park Rd. Span 'Solutions' Discounted by D.C. Aide," Washington Evening Star, 5 February 1957; "New Span Asked Over Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 14 February 1957; "Cross-Park Traffic Study Gets 'High Priority' Tag," Washington Evening Star, 28 February 1957; "Citizen Groups Join in Park Bridge Plea," Washington Post, 27 March 1957; "Shut Park Span Irks Motorists," Washington Post, 19 May 1957.

controversial plan to convert one lane of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway into a bicycle commuter lane. While popular with cyclists, the lane closure significantly increased traffic congestion and drew the ire of automobile commuters, who greatly outnumbered their more athletic brethren. The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway bicycle lane experiment lasted one week. To placate displaced cyclists, the parkway's main bridle path was paved from Connecticut Avenue to Virginia Avenue, an imperfect solution that continues to cause problems, especially in the most constricted section of the valley between M and P streets. The NPS extended the paved bicycle/multi-use trail along Beach Drive during the 1970s. The constricted terrain between Broad Branch and Joyce Road made the construction of a parallel pathway in this section undesirable from scenic and environmental perspectives. Motorists and cyclists had to share Beach Drive in this stretch, an arrangement that neither group considered satisfactory.²⁴⁹

In 1980 the NPS considered various alternatives for creating a more equitable balance between cars and cyclists, such as constructing additional bicycle trails and enacting further restrictions on automobile traffic. Even the District of Columbia government officially acknowledged the need to reduce automobile commuting throughout the city by this time. Nine different scenarios were studied, ranging from minor road alterations to a total ban on automobile traffic on Beach Drive between Broad Branch Road and Sherrill Drive. One option called for closing the two ends of Beach Drive during rush hours to discourage commuting traffic but leaving the intervening sections open to recreational motorists. Another called for devoting one lane of Beach Drive between Broad Branch and Wise Road to bicycle traffic. The NPS recognized that the road closure scenarios would be politically inexpedient. Automobile commuters wasted no time in reminding NPS officials of their disapproval. Residents of surrounding neighborhoods also expressed concern that closing all or part of Beach Drive during rush hour would inundate local streets with commuter traffic. The idea of extending the Sunday automobile ban on the upper section of Beach Drive to Saturdays, however, generated little protest and was soon adopted. Mimicking the ceremonies accompanying the opening of many park roads, park officials and local cycling and conservation groups celebrated the Saturday road closure ordinance with a ribbon cutting and other festivities at the intersection of Beach Drive and Broad Branch Road on August 30, 1981. In October 1982 the weekend automobile ban was extended to the upper section of Beach Drive between Sherrill Drive and the District line, though motorists were permitted to use the short section between Wise Road and Kalmia Road to cut across the park. Bicycling groups continued to lobby for various full or partial weekday closure scenarios, arguing that the Rock Creek Park roads should be devoted to recreational motoring and cycling, not to heavy commuter use. One irate cyclist complained that under existing policies, Rock Creek Park was not really a park, but "an interstate highway with added

²⁴⁹ Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 89-91; Sarah Booth Conroy, "Pedaling is Pure Purgatory," Washington Post, 10 August 1970; Paul Hodge, "Aiming to Curb Park's Commuter Flow," Washington Post, 23 October 1980; Peter Eng, "Park Service Closes Beach Drive on Weekends, Holidays," Washington Post, 30 August 1981.

attractions tacked along the side." Anti-automobile activists pointed to parallel practices in New York City's Central and Prospect parks, where automobile use had been gradually restricted to peak rush hour periods, with the roads reserved for non-motorized visitors throughout most of the day and on weekends. New York park and transportation officials asserted that the road closures proved to be a popular and practical success, increasing public use of both parks without appreciably disturbing surrounding traffic patterns.²⁵⁰

In 1983 the NPS tentatively endorsed a proposal backed by the bicyclist-dominated People's Alliance for Rock Creek Park (PARC), which called for a complete prohibition of automobile traffic on Beach Drive above Boulder Bridge as soon as the Washington Metro's Red line was completed to Van Ness, which was scheduled to occur in 1985. The weekend and holiday closure rule would remain in effect on the rest of Beach Drive above Joyce Road. South of Broad Branch, one lane of Beach Drive would be reserved for bicyclists during weekday rush hours. Under pressure from automobile groups, commuters, and the D.C. Department of Public Works and Transportation, the NPS quickly back-tracked on this proposal, opting instead to keep Beach Drive fully open to motorists during rush hours and promising to further study the issue of constructing a parallel bicycle path between Joyce Road and Broad Branch. The weekend and holiday closures were retained. Bicycling groups and conservation associations complained loudly, but to little avail. While the National Parks and Conservation Association upbraided the park service for reneging on its proposal to curtail commuter use of Rock Creek Park, the organization opposed the parallel bicycle path alternative as unduly destructive of park scenery. NPS managers agreed. As of 1998, the multi-use trail along Beach Drive extended from the zoo to Broad Branch Road and from Joyce Road to Bingham Drive. The weekend and holiday road closures remained in effect from Broad Branch north, but on weekdays motorists and cyclists were still forced to share Beach Drive in the northern reaches of the park and between Broad Branch and Joyce Road. Many cyclists persisted in using Beach Drive even in sections where the NPS had constructed the paved parallel pathway, objecting to sharing the trail with slower walkers, joggers, and roller-bladers and insisting they had equal right to use all the park roadways at any time.²⁵¹

Bicycle activists renewed their campaign to ban commuter traffic from Rock Creek Park in 1991. A loosely knit, cyclist-dominated group called "Auto-Free D.C." again took up the call

²⁵⁰ Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 90-91; Paul Hodge, "Aiming to Curb Park's Commuter Flow," Washington Post, 23 October 1980; Chris Kenrick, "Commuter Ban in Park Urged," Washington Star, 15 March 1981; Paul Hodge, "Rock Creek Traffic: Lesson from N.Y.," Washington Post, 30 July 1981; Paul Hodge, "Beach Drive Restriction Slated," Washington Post, 20 August 1981; Peter Eng, "Park Service Closes Beach Drive on Weekends, Holidays," Washington Post, 30 August 1981; Paul Hodge, "More Sections of Road in Park to be Closed," Washington Post, 14 July 1982.

²⁵¹ Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History, 91-93; "City Official Opposes Closing Road in Park," Washington Post, 24 February 1983.

for permanent closure of Beach Drive to through traffic. Auto-Free D.C. spokesmen asserted that rush hour traffic on Beach Drive was causing environmental damage to the park, threatening wildlife, and discouraging other forms of transportation that were more compatible with Rock Creek Park's intended function as "a public pleasure ground." According to the logic of the anti-automobile activists, commuting cyclists were admissible because they experienced Rock Creek Park in a more immediate and direct manner than motorists, who theoretically turned a blind eye to the park's natural beauties. Wary of provoking excessive public wrath, the anti-automobile activists insisted they did not want to completely ban cars from the park. The proposed road closures would discourage commuters but leave most of the cross-roads and internal access roads open, so that all of the park's major recreational facilities and twenty-eight of thirty picnic groves would still be readily accessible by automobile. When the NPS refused to adopt these suggestions, Auto-Free D.C. activists became more aggressive. In 1994 they instituted a series of protests centered around "rolling road blocks," in which packs of cyclists clogged Beach Drive during rush hour to disrupt commuter traffic and call attention to their cause. Most of these protests were generally peaceable, with park police providing motorized escorts and the number of riders limited to twenty-four in order to circumvent D.C. regulations that required formal permits for demonstrations involving more than twenty-five participants. Tempers flared on occasion, however, and several altercations and arrests occurred. In one incident, "anonymous" protesters graffitied the Military Road Bridge with anti-automobile slogans the night before one of the "rolling road blocks" was to be covered by the local press. Auto-Free D.C.'s activism prompted one angry suburbanite to complain to the Washington Post that the weekend closures had ruined his family's picnicking pleasures and to protest that "an elite faction" of bicyclists had no right to restrict enjoyment of Rock Creek Park to physically fit athletes riding expensive toys. Recognizing that the group was in danger of being marginalized on the radical fringe, Auto-Free D.C. leaders began working with representatives of more established and broad-based conservation groups such as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and the Washington Area Bicyclists Alliance (WABA) in order to lobby more effectively for changes in Rock Creek Park's road management policy. For the time being, the official NPS position was that the weekend and holiday partial closure policy was sufficient and that the roads in Rock Creek Park could and should handle the existing mix of commuters, recreational motorists, cyclists, and other outdoor enthusiasts.²⁵²

In the late 1980s, the NPS engaged the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) to conduct a detailed engineering study of the roads in Rock Creek Park. Engineers from the FHA's Eastern District Federal Division closely examined the physical condition of all park roads, monitored traffic, and compared their findings to the criteria established in the 1984 NPS Park

²⁵² Lisa Gray, "Protest on Wheels," Washington City Paper, 4-10 March 1994; Lisa Gray, "Arrest of Bike Blockade," Washington City Paper, 25-31 March, 1994; "Restore Our Sunday Drives," letter from C. S. Matthews to editor Washington Post, 9 April 1994; "Rock Creek Park: Not For Polluting Commuters," letter from Mark Robinowitz, Auto-Free D.C., to editor, Washington Post, 21 April 1994; Mark Robinowitz, "Rock Creek: Protect the Park," Auto-Free News (Winter 1996), 4.

Road Standards handbook. In the introduction to their report, FHA engineers compared the results of their technical study with the perceived management aims of Rock Creek Park and alluded to the political ramifications of various management options, acknowledging that solutions that might appear to be correct from a purely technical viewpoint might not be desirable from a broader-based perspective that encompassed more subjective social, cultural, and environmental concerns. The NPS Park Road Standards established guidelines for the technical qualities of park roads in relationship to such factors as expected traffic speeds and volumes. By the mid 1980s the lower portion of Beach Drive was carrying almost 25,000 vehicles a day, while approximately 50,000 vehicles a day funneled through the most heavily used portion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. High speed, heavily trafficked roads required straighter, wider pavements with break-down lanes, substantial clear zones, and related considerations that conflicted with the classic park road experience of narrow, winding roadways intimately connected to the surrounding trees and topography. While Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was more or less in compliance with NPS standards for urban parkways, the FHA engineers determined that the commuting traffic burden on Beach was so great that upgrading the road to conform to contemporary safety standards would unduly compromise the park's scenic and historic integrity. In the most heavily used section of Beach Drive, adherence to the 1984 Park Road Standards would require the construction of two additional 12'-wide travel lanes flanked by 8'-wide level and stabilized shoulders to serve as breakdown lanes, a course of action that was clearly incompatible with the underlying agenda of protecting limited natural scenery and providing recreational opportunities. Since it was impossible to upgrade the roadway to accommodate existing and future traffic, the FHA advised that the best alternative would be to reverse the traditional construction-oriented approach and reduce the traffic flow on Beach Drive to the point that only minimal road improvements would be necessary to satisfy NPS standards. Even this would be impossible in some places, the FHA acknowledged, in which case scenic preservation goals should prevail. The FHA suggested several strategies for reducing traffic on the park's main drive. These included eliminating the one-way rush hour traffic pattern on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, strictly enforcing park speed limits, establishing policies to promote or require car-pooling, and the institution of user fees for vehicles entering the park. In order to meet the NPS standard of 8,000 vehicles per day for a two-lane park road, traffic on Piney Branch Parkway would have to be cut in half and the number of vehicles using Beach Drive between Tilden Street and the zoo tunnel reduced to a third of its current volume. The permanent closure of all or part of Beach Drive was also suggested as a possible option. The FHA study observed that the Washington Metro system could easily absorb the displaced motorists, but noted "none of these measures would be popular with existing commuters in the Park and no doubt there would be a great deal of public opposition."²⁵³

²⁵³ Federal Highway Administration, Eastern Direct Federal Division, Engineering Study Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C. (Arlington, Virginia: Federal Highway Administration, Eastern Direct Federal Division, 1988), I-ii, 1-29, quote, p. 29.

The easiest and most immediate traffic limitation measure, the engineers recommended, would be the elimination of the one-way rush hour traffic pattern on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. This would not only reduce the parkway's carrying capacity and ease the related burden on Beach Drive, but eliminate an expensive and historically dangerous practice that park managers had long recognized as one of the principal sources of accidents within their jurisdiction. Another safety hazard and contributor to the inflated traffic volumes on both the park roads and the parkway was the tendency of motorists to ignore the posted speed limits of 25 mph within the park and 35 mph on the parkway. Strict enforcement of existing speed limits would improve safety while making the park roads less attractive to hurried commuters. Unfortunately, the NPS had limited manpower to undertake extensive traffic law enforcement efforts and the narrow park roads with no break down lanes made ticketing difficult and even dangerous. Similar concerns made the car pool suggestion more attractive in theory than in reality. Even if speeds and traffic volumes could be reduced, the FHA determined, it would cost approximately \$150 million to upgrade the park roadways to minimum modern standards. Aside from being prohibitively expensive, the required construction would radically transform the park experience in a manner reminiscent of the long-defeated express-parkway proposals of the 1950s and 1960s. FHA engineers outlined a program of modest improvements, which they cast as being compatible with existing park management strategies emphasizing recreation and resource preservation. The engineers advised placing warning signs on sharp curves and recommended further investigation of the possibility of employing skid-resistant pavements in such locations. The FHA noted the existing standards called for 10' clear zones beyond the edges of the roads. This would require considerable tree-cutting, excavation, and blasting, along with the destruction or radical reconfiguration of many bridges. Since this was clearly unfeasible, the engineers suggested that new plantings and construction respect modern safety standards. The FHA also condemned most of the park's existing timber guard rail, noting that it was so far below modern standards that it properly qualified as "guide-rail" rather than "guard-rail." The engineers recommended replacing substandard railings with steel-backed timber guard rail that met modern standards yet harmonized with the traditional park environment. A replacement program was adopted and virtually all of the park's old guard rails were replaced with the new steel-backed timber model. FHA engineers also recommended replacing existing drop-inlet grates with either curb inlets or modern safety grates designed with slots perpendicular to the flow of traffic, which were much less hazardous to cyclists and in-line skaters. These recommendations were also followed. Most of the offending grates were eliminated during subsequent road refurbishing projects.²⁵⁴

The FHA detailed a number of major realignments and alterations that would enable Beach Drive traffic to safely maintain a higher and more constant rate of travel, freely admitting that these traffic improvement measures would be controversial and, in some cases, clearly at counter-purposes to the broader management goals of the park. Two relatively bold suggestions

²⁵⁴ Engineering Study Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C., 29-38.

that promised to alleviate significant traffic circulation problems were the relocation of the east end of Wise Road and the construction of grade-separated interchange at the junction of Cathedral Avenue and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Shifting the east end of Wise Road so that it intersected Beach Drive directly across from West Beach Drive would eliminate a hazardous intersection and enable utilitarian traffic to cross the park with minimal disruption to north-south recreational or commuter traffic. The suggested alignment would follow the course of a gentle drainage curving slightly north of the existing roadway. Constructing the new roadway would undeniably eradicate a swath of forest, but the net loss of woodlands would be negligible if the NPS obliterated the old alignment and replanted it with native species. The proposed grade separation at Cathedral Avenue would be harder to construct without significant alterations to the landscape character of its surroundings. The grade separation structure and related access ramps would inevitably impinge upon the broad grassy area just south of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge. The FHA also maintained that resulting changes in roadway alignment would require replacing or significantly altering the rustic parkway bridge of Rock Creek just south of the projected construction. While the grade separation project would be controversial, at least in the short term, and the FHA's initial suggestion was probably too intrusive for serious consideration, further investigation might produce an acceptable method of alleviating one of the park and parkway's worst traffic circulation problems with an attractively designed, contextually appropriate interchange.²⁵⁵

The 1988 FHA study addressed road issues in Rock Creek Park from a traditional, tightly focused highway engineering perspective. While it provided a wealth of baseline data and made detailed recommendations for technical improvements to park roads, it left broader road management issues up to the NPS's discretion. In June 1996 the NPS announced that it would begin preparing a broad-based comprehensive long-term general management plan for Rock Creek Park. By establishing a coherent system of long-range goals, this document would provide a general framework for construction, management, and maintenance policies in Rock Creek Park over the next ten to fifteen years. Rock Creek Park officials held an open meeting in June 1996 to solicit public commentary and identify the most pressing public concerns. Not surprisingly, traffic issues were a dominant concern. A majority of the approximately 150 citizens who showed up for the initial public meeting pressed for changes to reduce or eliminate through traffic on Beach Drive. Other attendees defended Beach Drive's role as a commuter artery, insisting that motoring was not incompatible with other park management goals and asserting that even the heavy rush hour commuting practice was, in the argot of NPS planners "an appropriate established use."²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Engineering Study Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C., A-21 - A-27; A-80 - A-90.

²⁵⁶ Linda Wheeler, "Weighing the Future of Rock Creek," Washington Post, 27 July 1996; National Park Service, Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios, Number 3 (June 1997), 1-5.

During the summer and fall of 1996 the NPS engaged Robert Peccia & Associates, a Montana-based transportation consulting firm to conduct an extended study of traffic in Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. This study was intended to update earlier figures on traffic patterns and volumes and to provide new data on related environmental concerns such as air and noise pollution. The NPS-sponsored study found that the average weekday traffic count on Beach Drive was 5,188 vehicles at the Maryland line, 8,677 vehicles just south of Military Road, and 25,083 vehicles at the zoo tunnel. The average weekday traffic count on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was 41,923 vehicles south of Connecticut Avenue and 52,331 vehicles at Virginia Avenue. Motorists exceeded posted speed limits by an average of 5-13 mph on Beach Drive and 6-9 mph on the parkway. The average number of occupants per vehicle was 1.3. During prime commuting hours, more than 95 percent of vehicles entering Rock Creek Park passed through without stopping, except at intersections--all of which were backed up and operating substantially above ideal capacity. A related NPS study discovered that out of the 14.5 million people who entered Rock Creek Park in a single year, only 1.5 million stopped to get out of their cars. Surprisingly--at least to automobile opponents--scientific monitoring for carbon monoxide failed to produce substantial evidence to document claims that commuting traffic was generating air pollution in excess of federal standards. NPS planners insisted that the low readings reflected anomalous wind and precipitation conditions during the test period. Traffic noise levels measured at park picnic areas, the National Zoo, and in adjacent neighborhoods also proved to be within acceptable ranges, though federal noise standards were exceeded within 50' of Beach Drive and 125' of the parkway, impacting significant stretches of the parallel multi-use trail. The NPS study also found that non-motorized use of Beach Drive was thirteen to twenty times heavier on weekends than during the week. The automobile ban clearly played a major role in creating this disparity, but the NPS failed to note that recreational activities in general tended to increase dramatically on weekends. The related finding that recreational use of the multi-use trail in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway increased 50 percent on weekends would seem to substantiate this interpretation. Despite the oft-stated claim that mixing automobiles and bicycles was a recipe for mayhem, the NPS's study found that only 3.3 percent of reported accidents on park roads involved automobiles and bicyclists or pedestrians. The figure for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was even lower, at 1.5 percent. The total accident rate for both roads was well above average, however, at 3.87 accidents per million miles traveled for Beach Drive and 5.40 accidents per million miles for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios, Number 3, 8. A subsequent article in the Washington City Paper highlighted the consultants' accident report figures and related observations in a hyperbolic portrayal of Beach Drive and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as "D.C.'s Deadliest Road," (Jake Tapper, "Death Valley," Washington City Paper, 9 October 1998, 30-36). The 14.5 million/1.5 million figures cited in Eugene Meyer, "More Than A Walk in the Park," Washington Post Weekend, 16 October 1998, 42.

Taking these new statistics and the input from public commentary sessions into consideration, NPS planners examined the park's resources, studied previous planning documents and relevant legislation, and produced four potential management scenarios covering a range of options. In keeping with the National Environmental Policy Act's requirement that the planning process for any major action affecting federal properties consider a broad array of alternatives, the NPS's proposals ranged from no changes at all to extremes that agency planners probably knew to be intellectually tenuous and politically unfeasible. The simplest option, "Alternative Scenario 1: Current Management," called for maintenance of the status quo, keeping park roads open to all vehicles during the week but closing substantial sections of Beach Drive on weekends and holidays. The one-way rush hour traffic practice on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would remain in effect. "Alternative Scenario 2: Recreation Emphasis" called for a number of modest alterations that would theoretically enhance Rock Creek Park's recreational potential while reducing the number of vehicles using the park roads and parkway. Automobiles would still be allowed on all park roads throughout the week, but during rush hours admittance to Beach Drive would be restricted to vehicles with two or more occupants (HOV-2). Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would carry two-way traffic at all times, preferably with the same HOV-2 rush hour restrictions as Beach Drive. Under this scenario, the paved multi-use trail would be improved and expanded to better accommodate the growing number and variety of users. The multi-use trail at Bingham Drive would also be improved and a new trail would be constructed parallel to Wise Road. The police substation near the junction of Beach Drive and Morrow Drive would be converted into a visitor contact station and bike-rental facility. "Alternative Scenario 3: Scenic Driving Emphasis" was intended to preserve Rock Creek Park's intended function as an attractive location for scenic driving while significantly reducing its appeal as a high-volume commuting artery. The NPS proposed to accomplish this goal by cutting Beach Drive into two discontinuous segments. The north and south ends would remain open, but automobile traffic would be barred from a short segment stretching between Boulder Bridge and picnic groves numbers 3 and 4. Wily motorists willing to tackle the steep, winding course of Ross Drive could easily circumvent this obstruction. The substantial streams of traffic entering Beach Drive via Broad Branch Road and Piney Branch Parkway would be unaffected by this closure. The HOV-2 restrictions and elimination of one-way rush hour traffic on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would be carried over from Scenario 2 in the hopes of reducing traffic and improving safety and air quality. Additional road-related measures proposed in Scenario 3 included the construction of speed bumps on Wise Road and the conversion of Sherrill Drive from a motor road into a paved trail. Grant Road would also be declared off-limits to private automobiles, though it would continue to be used by park staff for maintenance purposes. "Alternative Scenario 4: Urban Wilderness Emphasis" was the most radical proposal. Substantial sections of Beach Drive would be permanently closed to automobile traffic and converted into a broad multi-use trail. Automobile access to Rock Creek Park would be limited to two short segments: one at the north end of the park accessed by Military Road and the other between Peirce Mill and Klinge Road. Wise Road, Sherrill Drive, Bingham Drive, Grant Road, and Blagden Avenue would be converted to paved trails. Morrow Drive and Joyce Road would apparently be obliterated. Glover Road and Ross Drive would be preserved to provide limited

opportunities for scenic driving. Automobiles would still be allowed to use Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, but the HOV-2 rush hour regulations would be strictly enforced. In keeping with the professed goal of transforming Rock Creek Park into an "Urban Wilderness," Scenario 4 called for the elimination of several major recreation and administration facilities along with the institution of a more "natural" vegetation management policy that would curtail mowing and allow woodlands to overtake existing fields and recreation areas. The park police substation on Beach Drive would be removed, as would the park police stable in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The horse center, maintenance yard, and equitation field on Glover Road would be eliminated and their sites restored to woodlands. A similar fate would befall the stables and community gardens near Bingham Drive. The original version of Scenario 4 even called for removing the Carter Barron Amphitheater and nearby tennis courts along with the historic Rock Creek Park golf course, though the NPS quickly backed away from the first two radical and politically inexpedient proposals. The proposed policy of forsaking established mowing and tree-trimming programs along the park roads and parkway was cast as more "natural" and more ecologically desirable than traditional scenery-enhancing vista management programs and more economical, as well.²⁵⁸

The NPS unveiled these proposals in June 1997 and held two highly publicized "open houses" at the Rock Creek Park Nature Center to solicit additional public input. These events were attended by close to 800 citizens representing a variety of viewpoints. While some attendees evidently expected semi-formal hearings or a town-meeting format, where practiced speakers could hold the floor and present extended arguments, the NPS opted for a more informal, workshop-style interchange. The alternative scenarios were displayed on easels and pens and large tablets were provided for citizens to write their opinions. Park staff mingled throughout the crowd, taking questions and explaining the various scenario's components and underlying rationales. Attendees also engaged in spirited discussions among themselves, with pro- and anti-automobile forces debating the pros and cons of the various scenarios in impromptu interchanges that occasionally threatened to exceed the bounds of polite disagreement. A court reporter was present to record these informal conversations, which were later transcribed and entered in to the record. The NPS also solicited telephone and E-mail suggestions through the local newspapers, printed handouts, and Rock Creek Park's website. Planners even handed out copies of the planning proposals to commuters stuck in traffic on Beach Drive. Throughout the process the NPS emphasized that the proposed scenarios reflected general planning goals and that the individual components of each alternative were susceptible to significant modification. Park officials also tried to make clear that elements from various plans could be combined and that the final management plan was likely to contain aspects of more than one proposal. Citizens

²⁵⁸ Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios, Number 3, 6-7. As portrayed in this widely disseminated document, the controversial "Urban Wilderness" scenario explicitly called for elimination of the Rock Creek Park Tennis Stadium and the Carter Barron Amphitheater. Bowing to public outrage, and the inconvenient fact that these areas were also part of the D.C. recreation system, a supplement distributed by the National Park Service characterized these notations as "errors."

were encouraged to suggest such combinations on their own, and to explain their reasons for favoring either individual components or complete scenarios.²⁵⁹

By July 1997 the NPS had received over 1,000 written responses. In January 1998, the NPS provided a summary of the public commentary on the specific individual proposals and Rock Creek Park management issues in general. Perhaps the most striking results of the NPS's public outreach effort was the discovery that most park users were more or less content with the status quo. Approximately half the respondents believed that Rock Creek Park and its road system were functioning satisfactorily and that no significant changes were needed or desired. Alternative Scenario 1, the "current management" scenario proved to be the most popular option. Adherents of this point of view thought that existing development and management strategies provided an appropriate balance of recreational opportunities, practical transportation benefits, and scenic and environmental preservation. Many supporters of the status quo praised the weekend closure of Beach Drive but had little interest in extending the automobile ban to weekdays. The weekend closures were applauded as attractive means of encouraging recreational access to the park, but respondents in this category apparently did not believe it was necessary or practical to prohibit automobiles at all time. A significant number of respondents contended that maintaining the commuting function of Rock Creek Park's roads was important not just as a practical necessity, but because they cherished their daily drives through the park's restful and attractive scenery. The ability to drive to work through Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, many respondents claimed, was a unique attraction that added appreciably to the quality of their lives. Another frequently cited reason for objecting to the various proposals to close portions of Beach Drive was the concern that displaced motorists would inundate surrounding streets and neighborhoods, sowing danger and congestion in their wake. Even those who opposed major changes to the park road system agreed that it was necessary and desirable to enforce traffic regulations more aggressively in order to reduce speeding and increase safety. Many people who supported the status quo approach suggested that if changes to Rock Creek Park's circulation system were to be made, it was the multi-use trails, and not the auto roads, that constituted the most pressing problems. Widening the trails to accommodate increasingly heavy and diverse use and extending them throughout the length of Beach Drive were cast as high priorities. "Alternative Scenario 1" was the official choice of local government entities. The D.C. City Council and the Montgomery County Council endorsed the "Current Management" scenario, as did several advisory neighborhood

²⁵⁹ Linda Wheeler, "The Public Comes But Isn't Heard," *Washington Post*, 26 June 1997; "Comments on Rock Creek Park Sought," *Washington Post*, 31 July 1997; "Rock Creek Park: The Citizens Have Their Say," letter from Rock Creek Park Superintendent Adrienne Coleman to the editor, *Washington Post*, 2 August 1997; National Park Service, *Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios*, Number 4 (January 1998), 1. The author attended one of the June planning open houses and discussed the planning process with various park personnel.

commissions.²⁶⁰

Alternative Scenario 2, with its "recreation emphasis" and minimal infringements on existing driving patterns was also quite popular, coming in second to the "Current Management" option. Fans of this alternative felt that the rush hour car pool rule on Beach Drive and the elimination of one-way traffic on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were reasonable restrictions that might reduce or at least stabilize automobile use without resorting to the disruptive and unpopular full or partial closure options. Alternative Scenario 2 highlighted the improvement of the park's multi-use trails, which were widely perceived as inadequate for existing needs. The least popular alternative was Scenario 3, the "Scenic Driving Emphasis." By the 1990s, the practice of scenic driving, which had played such an important role in the creation and initial development of Rock Creek Park, was no longer seen as an appropriate priority for urban park management. The very term "scenic driving" apparently struck most observers as an odd and unfamiliar concept, at least when applied to the constricted confines of Rock Creek Park. Americans still enjoyed motoring through natural and pastoral scenery, but with the extended range of modern automobiles, the improvement in roads and tourist facilities, and the increasing scarcity of urban natural areas, scenic driving was something to be pursued in the countryside or along extended parkways such as the Blue Ridge Parkway or Natchez Trace Parkway, not in a diminutive and over-burdened urban reservation. Despite the low appeal of the NPS's explicitly labeled "Scenic Driving Emphasis" scenario, many people reported that they frequently went out of their way to drive through the park, even when it added to their driving time. On the other hand, some respondents specifically praised the Scenic Driving scenario for significantly impeding Beach Drive's function as a commuter artery, though proponents of this point of view generally favored Scenario 4, which took an even harder line on automobile access to the park. Scenarios 3 and 4 predictably came under fire from commuters and other pro-automobile forces.²⁶¹

Alternative 4, the "Urban Wilderness" scenario, was the third most popular option, and by far the most controversial. Many bicyclists and environmentalists acclaimed the "Urban Wilderness" scenario for its dramatic curtailment of automobile access, which they believed would significantly improve the park's status as a nature preserve and attractive location for non-motorized outdoor recreation. Critics contended that "urban wilderness" was an oxymoron and that it was both unrealistic and narrow-minded to attempt to "return" the park to a semblance of the primeval forest that had existed in Rock Creek valley before European settlement. Not only had surrounding development and resulting environmental changes made this course of action

²⁶⁰ Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios, Number 4, 3-4.

²⁶¹ Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios, Number 4, 3-5.

impossible, but the area had been set aside as a "public park and pleasuring ground" and had admirably fulfilled this role for over one hundred years. Most respondents considered facilities for automobile access to be an integral component of the park's broad-based appeal. Many also spoke out forcibly against plans to eliminate other "unnatural" but highly popular features such as the golf course, horse stables, and community gardens. Some respondents expressed concern that the elimination of these features and curtailment of automobile access would dramatically reduce visitation in the park, transforming it from a heavily used and broadly popular urban park to a secluded retreat for the athletically inclined elite. Some writers suggested that eliminating automobiles and cutting back on developed recreational facilities might create serious safety issues by undercutting the informal surveillance that helped deter crime in heavily used portions of the park. Even the majority of those favoring the "Urban Wilderness" scenario admitted that the horse stables, community gardens, and golf course were compatible with the general goal of reducing automobile use of the park and protecting its natural and scenic resources.²⁶²

As might be expected, the NPS's report on the findings of its survey failed to put an end to the controversy over the appropriate level of automobile access to Rock Creek Park. The protests were loudest from groups whose agendas fared poorly in the NPS's tally. The well-organized interest groups that had been able to dominate the planning discourse during its early stages were incensed when their voices were drowned out by the previously silent majority, whose general sentiment seemed to be that Rock Creek Park was not broken and that no radical measures were needed to fix it. Despite--or perhaps because of--the NPS's concerted effort to solicit widespread public comment, the Washington Area Bicyclists Alliance (WABA) accused the agency of "just going through the motions" of a general management planning effort. When the NPS announced that the "Current Management" alternative was the most popular planning scenario and reported that most people seemed to be generally content with the way Rock Creek was being managed, WABA insisted that the agency had stacked the deck against anti-automobile activists by grouping the Beach Drive traffic bans with even less popular options such as the elimination of the stables, golf course, and community gardens. Despite the NPS's clear and oft-repeated statements that the four scenarios were not set in stone and that the public should feel free to mix and match compelling elements, WABA insisted that the presentation was "packaged in a way that divided park users." WABA insinuated that the NPS had been derelict or perhaps even devious by not offering a fifth scenario reflecting the combination of options preferred by the revived People's Alliance for Rock Creek (PARC), which at this point consisted of WABA, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and eighteen other advocacy groups of varying size and stature. PARC's preferred management plan, which the organization termed

²⁶² Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter: Preliminary Alternative Scenarios, Number 4, 3-5. Roger K. Lewis, "Rock Creek Park: Deciding Its Role and Its Future," Washington Post, 19 July 1997. University of Maryland Architecture Professor Lewis assailed the urban wilderness scenario as "an obvious oxymoron" based on "fallacious" premises. Like many commentators, Lewis called for a combination of alternatives 1 and 2 that would improve the park's recreational facilities while leaving existing traffic patterns essentially unchanged.

"Alternative 2 ½" because it combined elements of scenarios 2 and 3, called for the establishment of permanent auto-free zones along Beach Drive north of Broad Branch in order to discourage commuters from using Rock Creek Park and enable bicyclists to travel from Maryland to the Mall without having to share the road with motorists. While the NPS's canvassing would seem to suggest that the broader public firmly rejected any such weekday closures of Beach Drive, WABA and its allies continued to lobby for stricter limitations on automobile use in Rock Creek Park along with the concomitant transformation of significant portions of existing motor roads into multi-use trails. The tremendous public interest in the future of Rock Creek Park, together with controversial nature of some of the proposals and the unexpectedly large volume of comments received caused the NPS to extend its deadline for publishing a draft general management plan until significantly after the proposed spring 1998 publication date. As of this writing no determinations had been made as to which, if any, changes would be made to the road system of Rock Creek Park.²⁶³

²⁶³ WABA expressed its perspective on the Rock Creek Park General Management Plan planning process in an E-Mail newsgroup posting titled "Rock Creek Park Alert!" 24 February 1998.

ILLUSTRATIONS

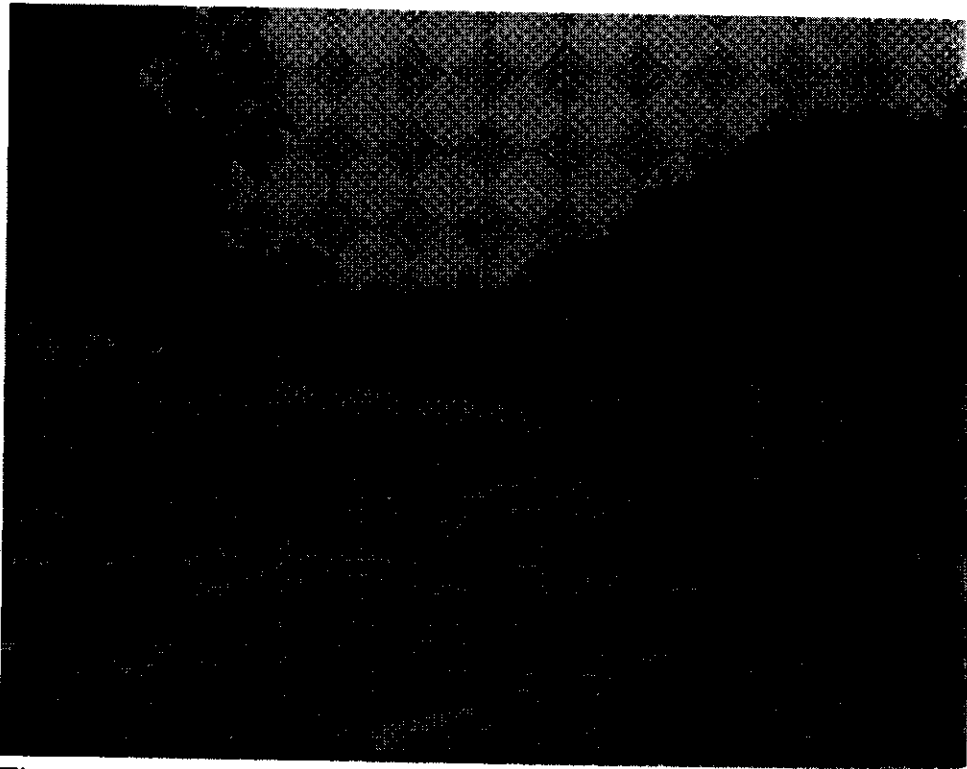


Figure 1: June 22, 1959. Stewart Brothers Photographers. Beach Drive bridge, general view, looking southwest. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

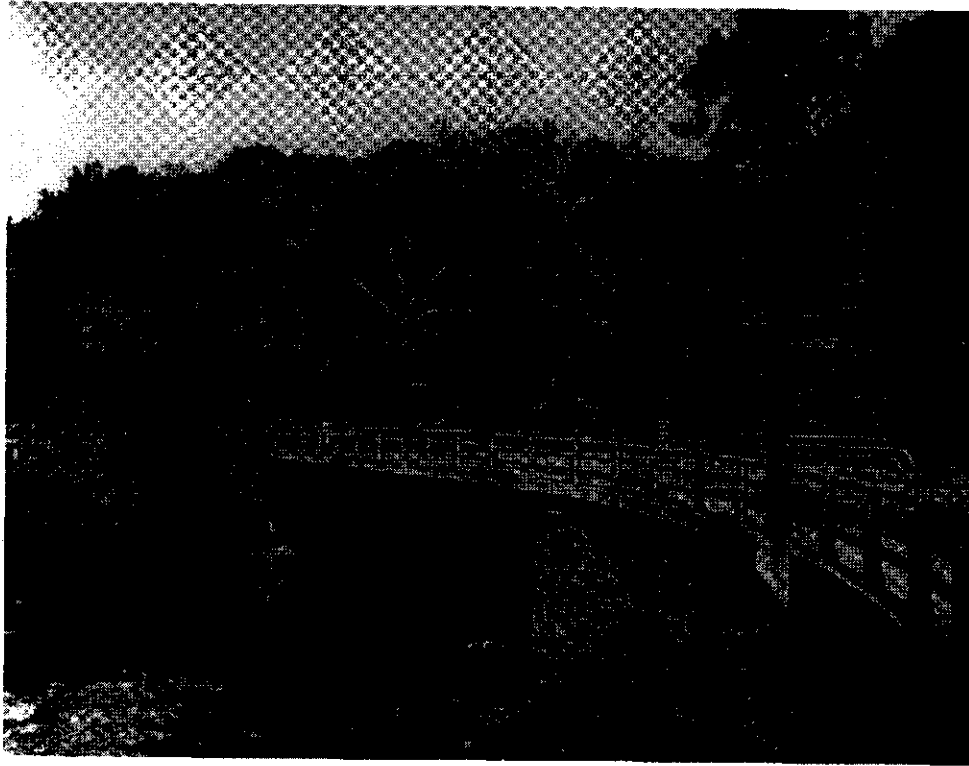


Figure 2: October 28, 1965. Beach Drive bridge at Blagden Avenue.
Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park
Service.



Figure 3: "Beach Drive just below Milk House Ford. By E.C. Whiting, 6 JUN 1917."
Photograph #2837-14, Olmsted Photograph Album Collection. Courtesy of the National
Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.



Figure 4: Postcard of Beach Drive, Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C. Caption on back reads: "The view is an excellent illustration of the picturesque Rock Creek Park, which nature and art have combined to make one of the most beautiful pleasure grounds." From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.

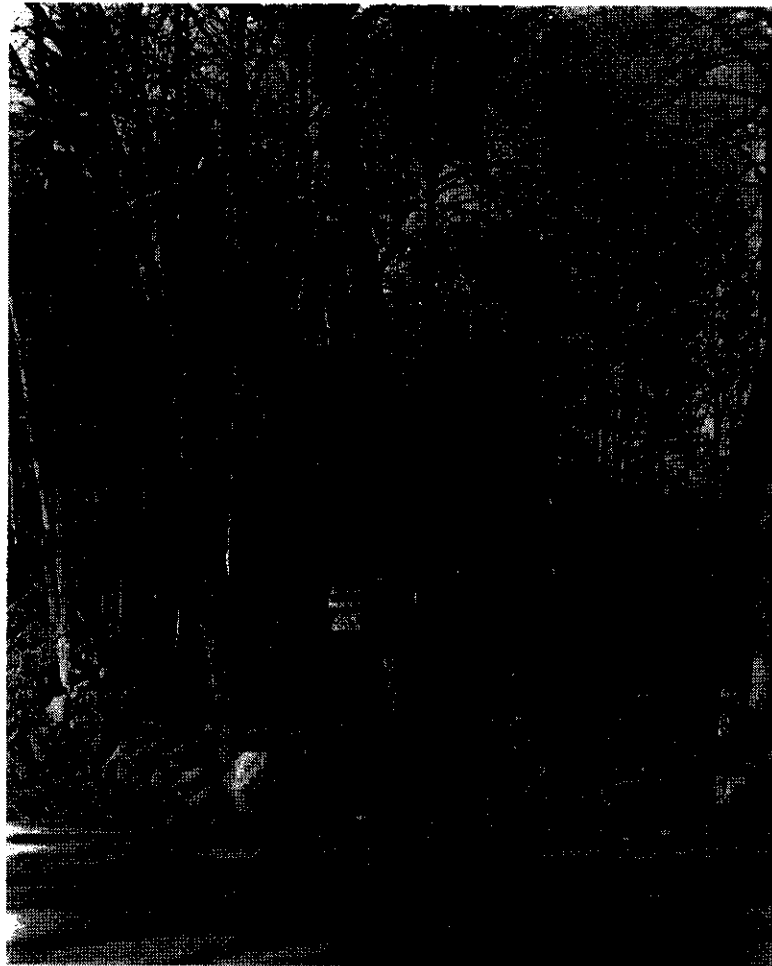


Figure 5: January 2, 1931. Beach Drive and Military Road. "Rustic sign [detail] at Beach Drive and Military Road in Rock Creek Park." Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

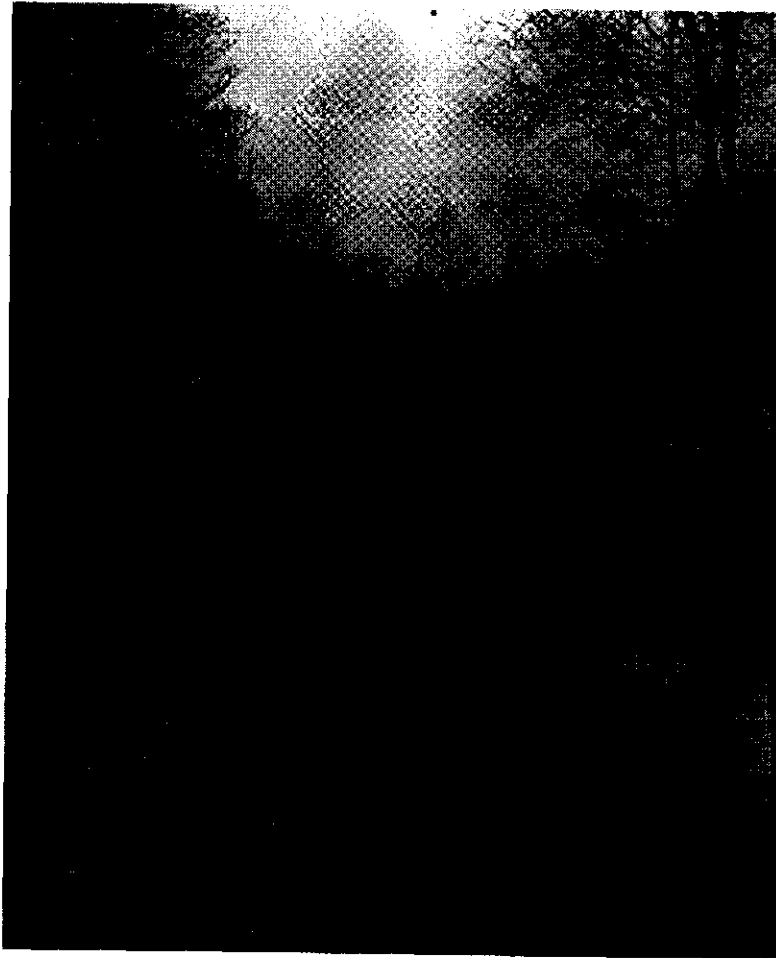


Figure 6: October 1932. Military Road, west of Rock Creek. Looking west. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

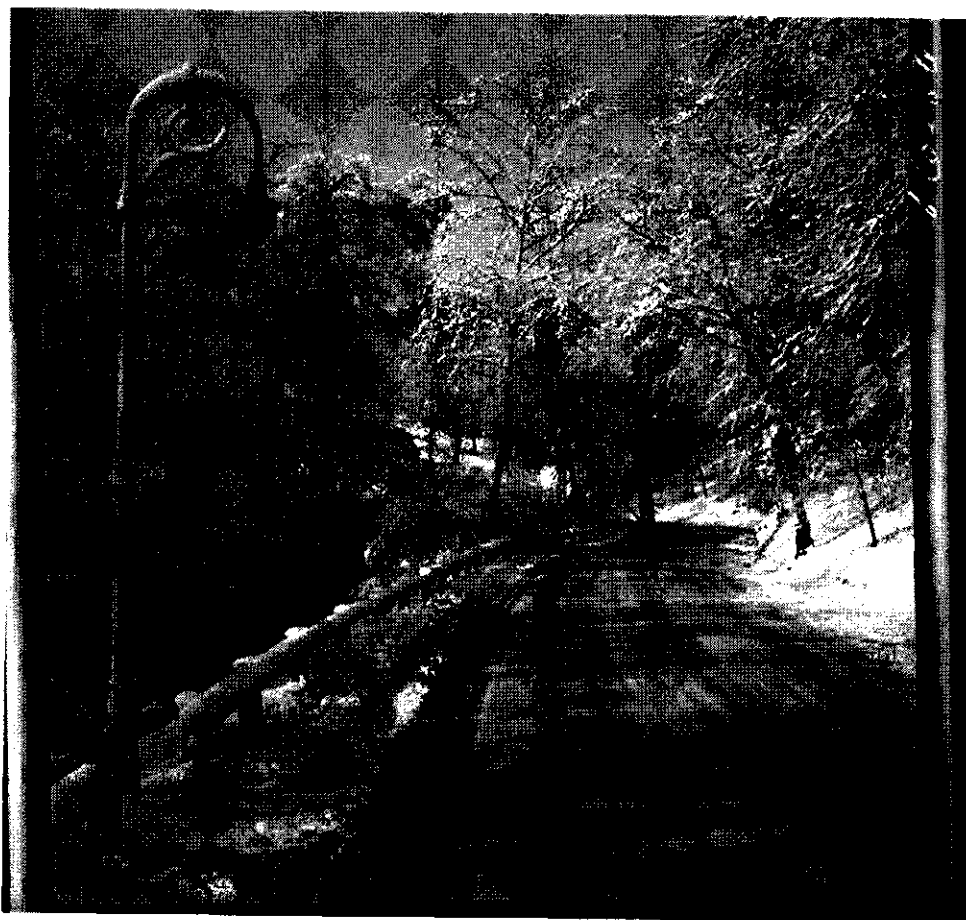


Figure 7: No date. Snow scene with unidentified road showing close-up of light standard and creek. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

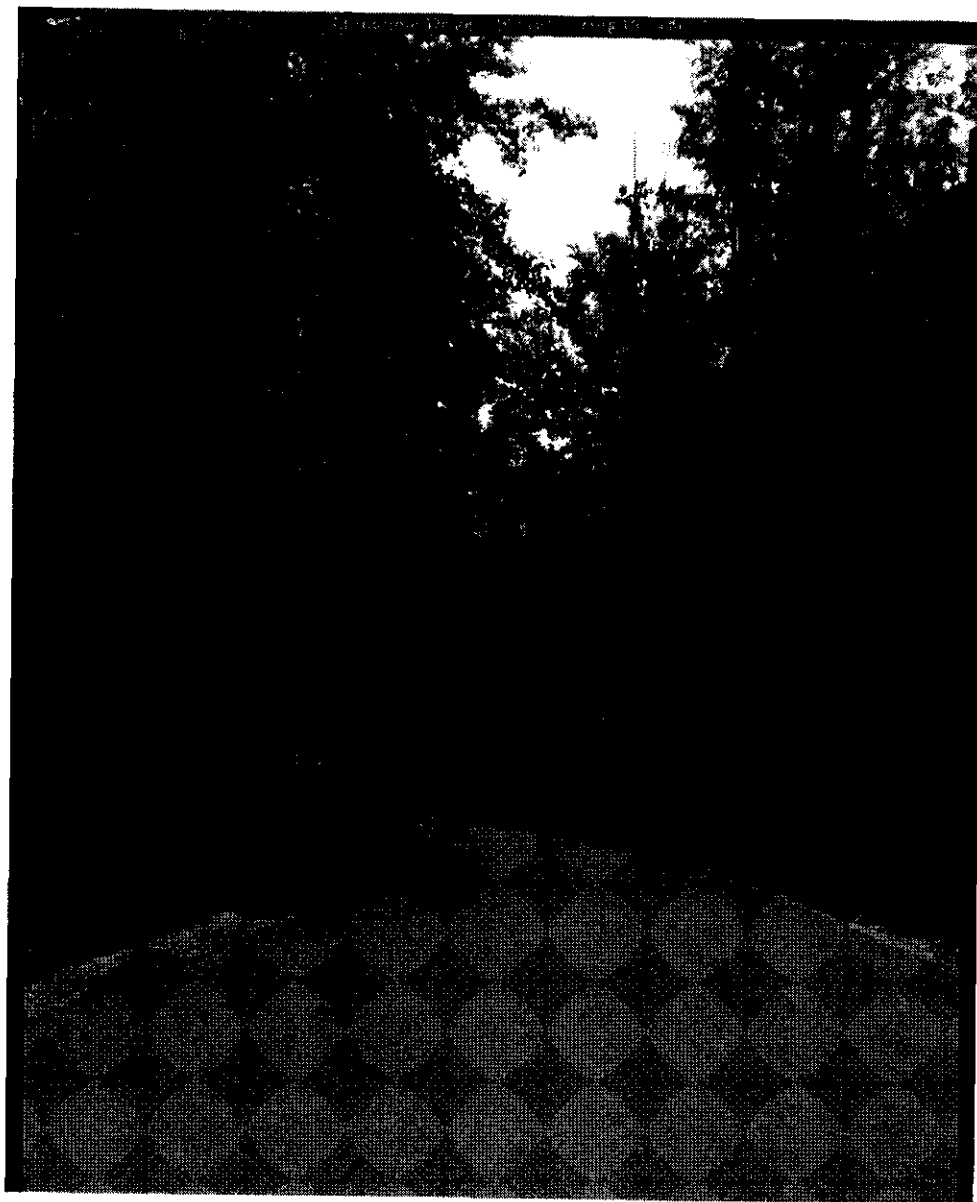


Figure 8: August 19, 1931. Bingham Drive. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

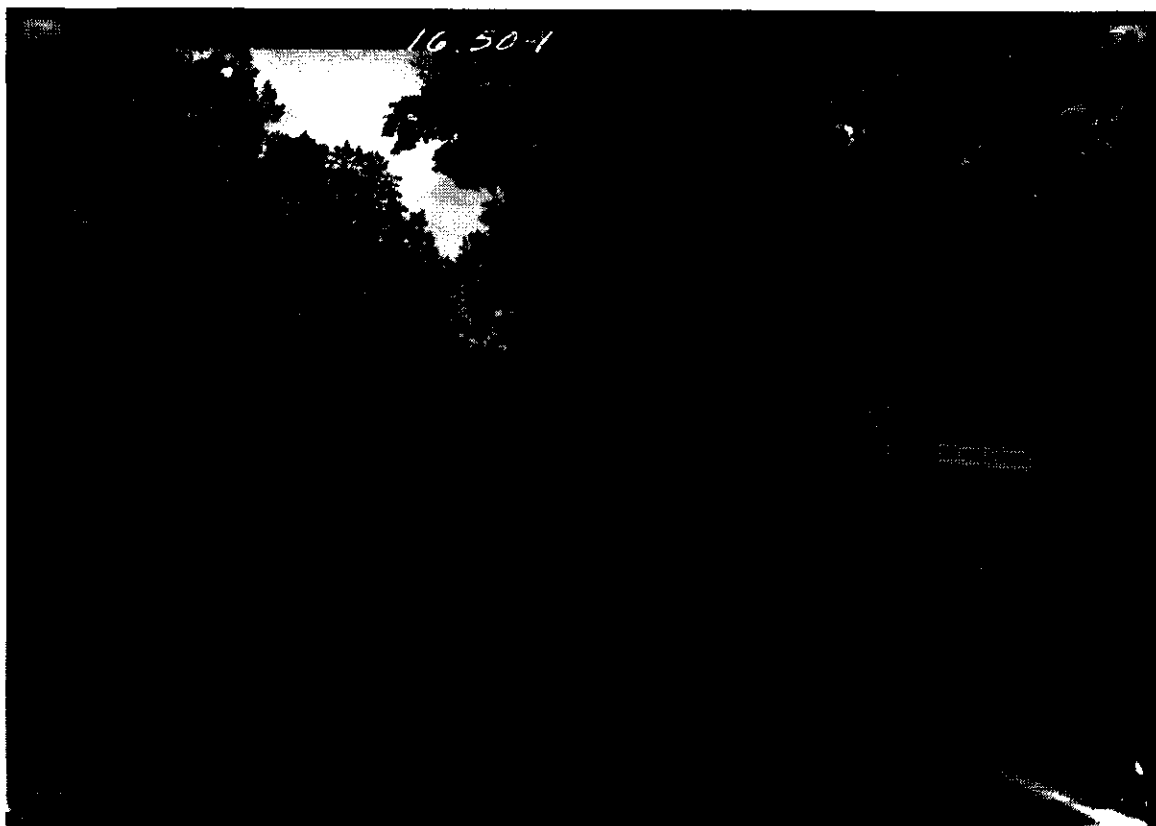


Figure 9: August 2, 1926. Sherrill Drive. Entrance road to Rock Creek Park. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

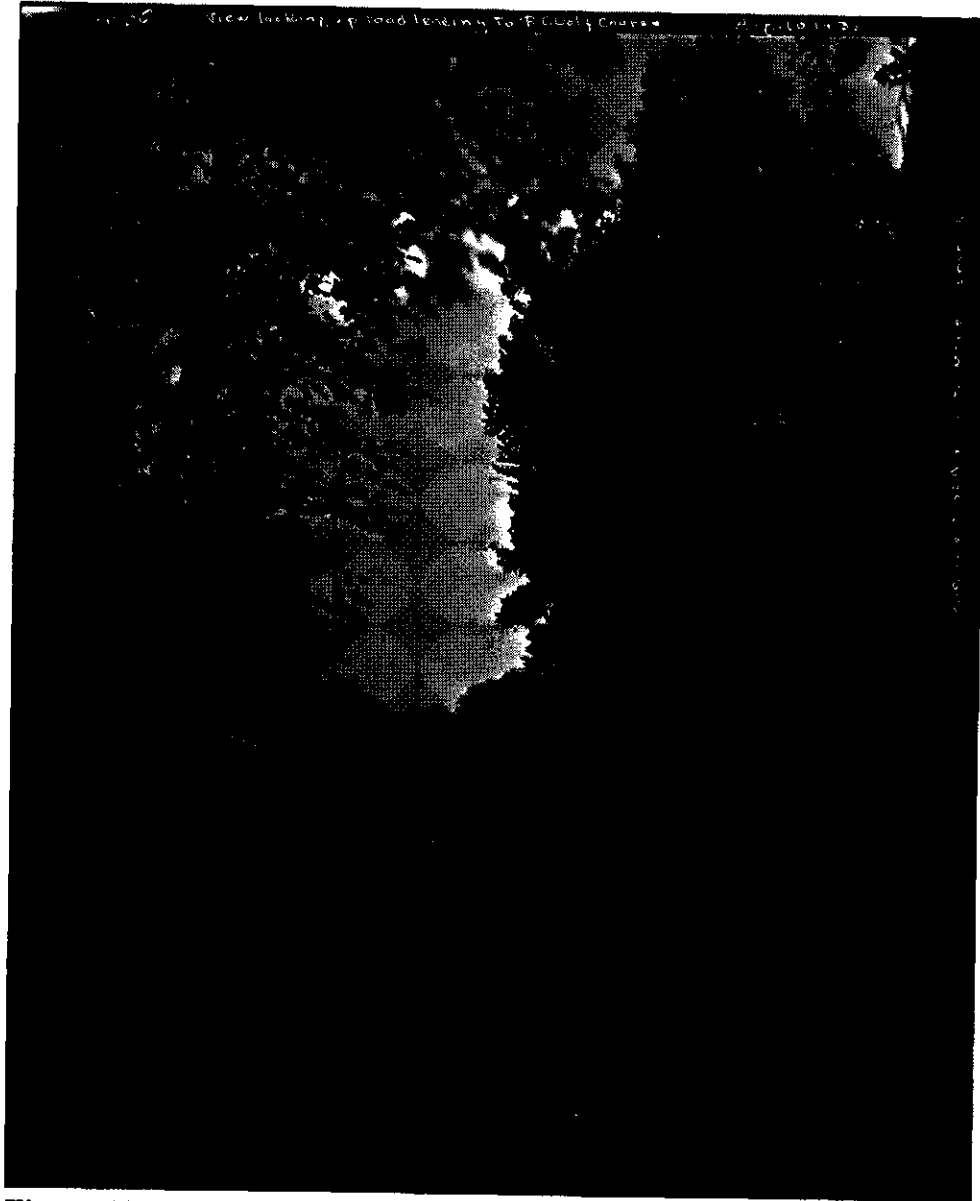


Figure 10: August 10, 1931. "View looking up road to R.C. Golf Course." "Farlie - Dept. of Agri. with movie camera." Photograph shows cobble gutters and guardrail. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 11: August 27, 1931. "View along Joyce Road leading to Rock Creek Golf Course." Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 12: May 2, 1933. Piney Branch Parkway, unemployment relief. Stone wall channelization of creek. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

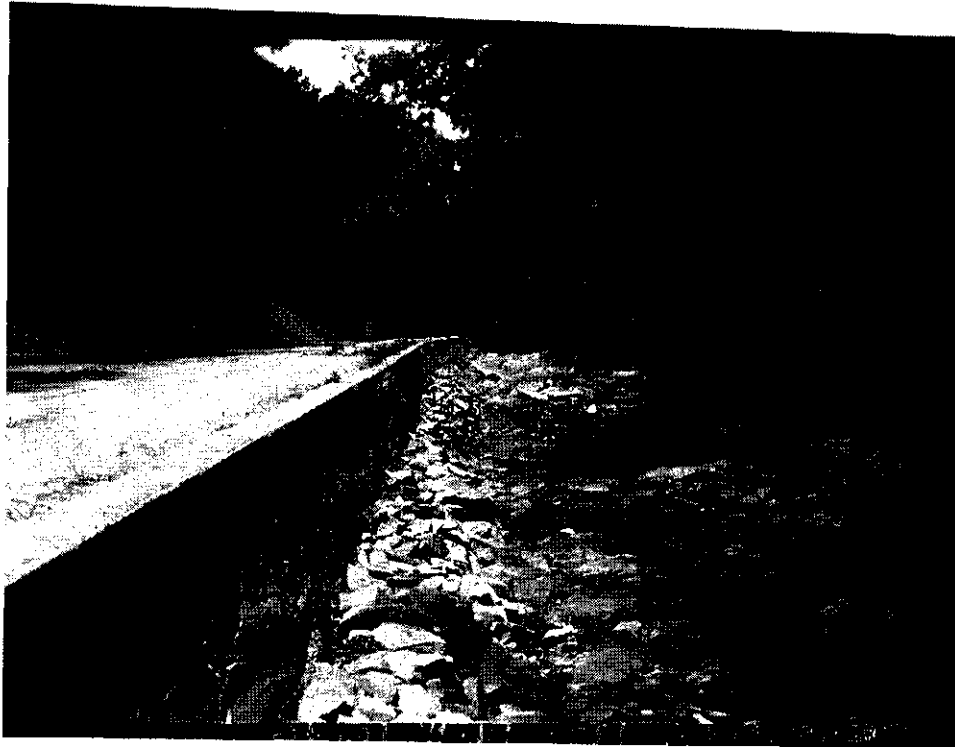


Figure 13: 1935. Piney Branch Parkway. Road with channelized creek.
Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park
Service.

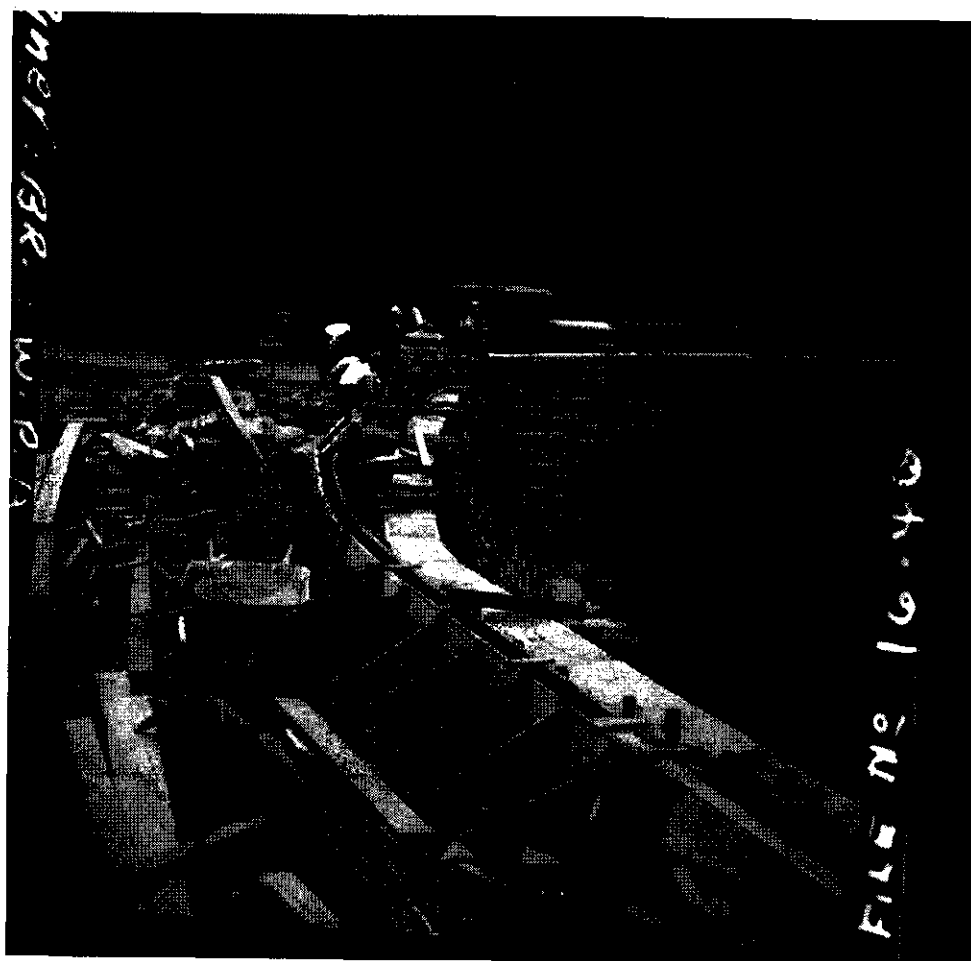


Figure 14: 1936. Piney Branch Parkway. Men working on road up to bridge, WPA. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 15: 1936. Piney Branch Parkway. Men working on road, WPA. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 16: January 4, 1937. Piney Branch Parkway. WPA work.
Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 17: No date. Piney Branch Parkway, between 16th Street and Park Road. No asphalt on roadbed. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 18: No date. Piney Branch Parkway. Men laying out subgrade, WPA. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 19: December 6, 1937. Piney Branch Parkway and 17th Street. WPA workers choke road and prepare to penetrate with asphalt emulsion. Note brick gutter. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

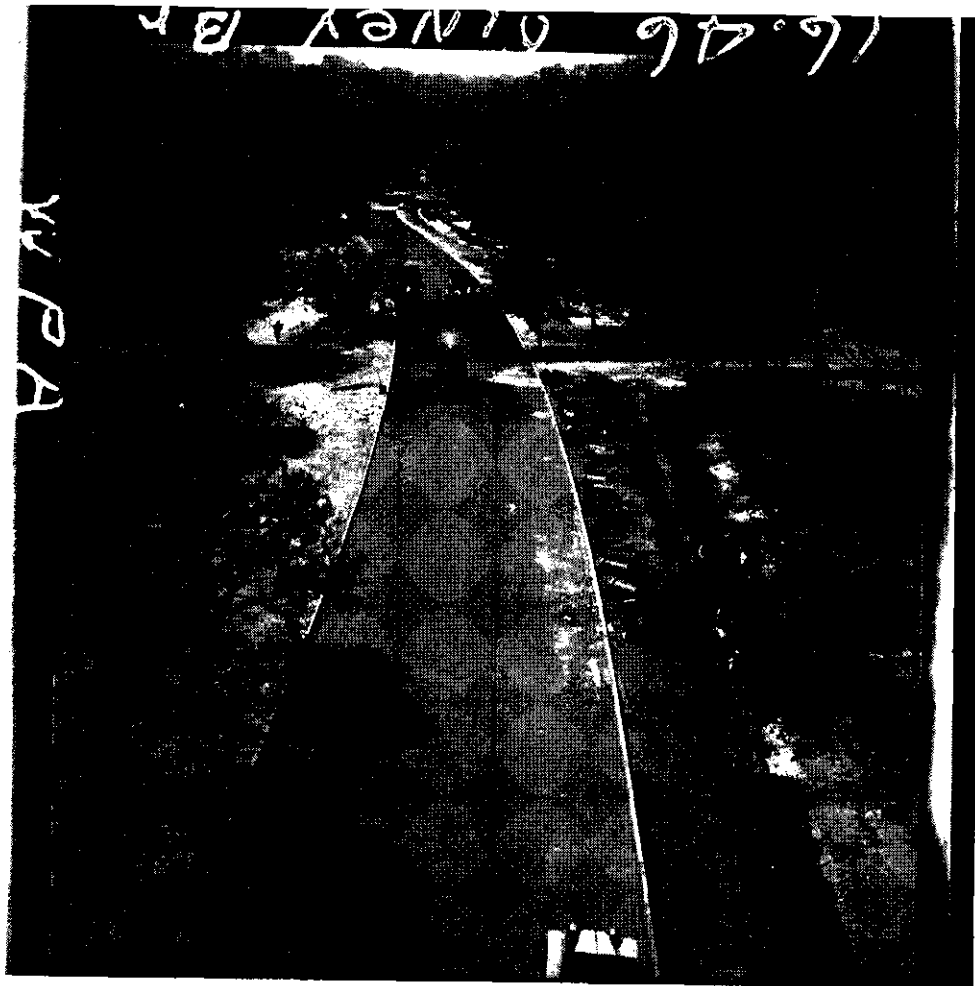


Figure 20: No date. Piney Branch Parkway. Paving of road by WPA workers. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.



Figure 21: Postcard of Rock Creek Park. From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.

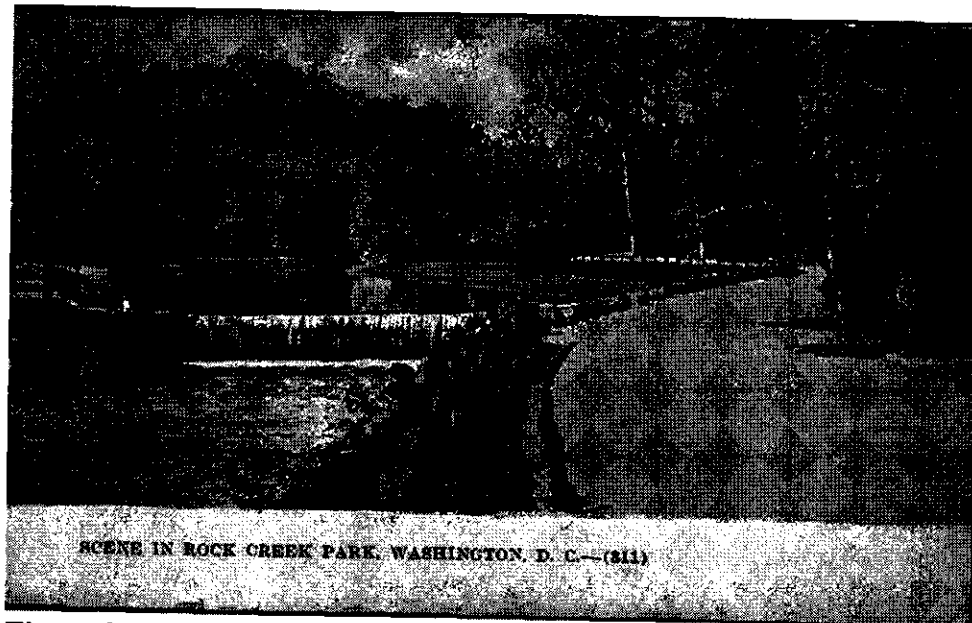


Figure 22: Postcard of Rock Creek Park. From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.

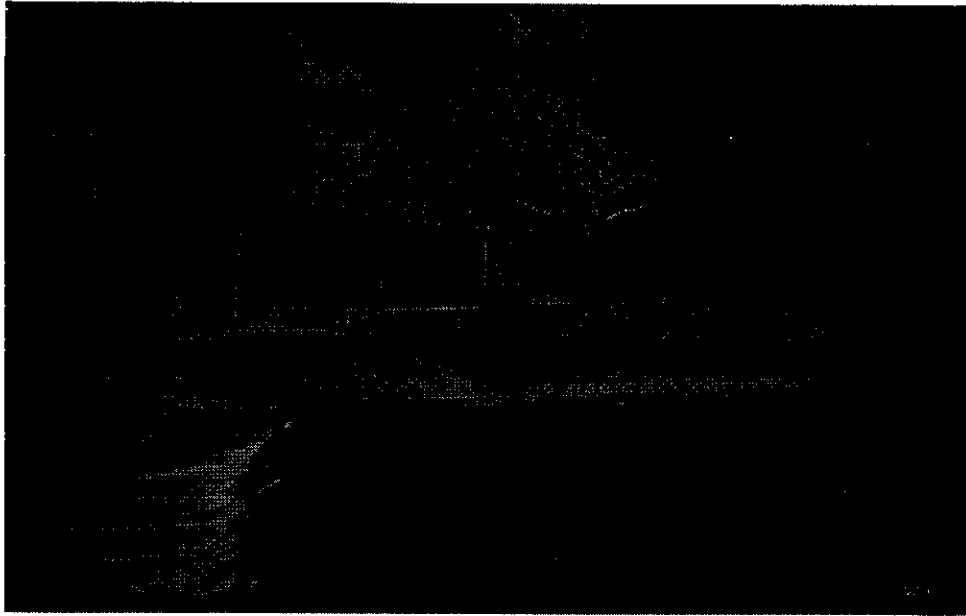


Figure 23: Postcard of Rock Creek Park. From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.



Figure 24: Postcard of Rock Creek Park. From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.



Figure 25: Postcard of Rock Creek Park. From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.

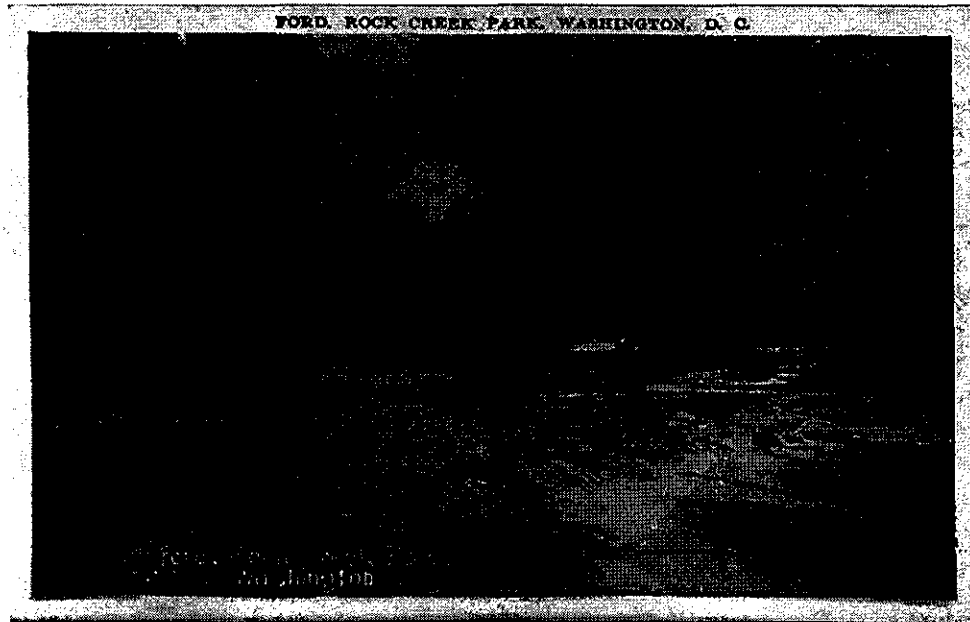


Figure 26: Postcard of ford in Rock Creek Park. Caption on back reads: "Rock Creek Park with extensive wooded slopes, crystal streams and miles of pleasure roads, is one of the largest and most beautiful public parks in America." From the private postcard collection of Timothy Davis.

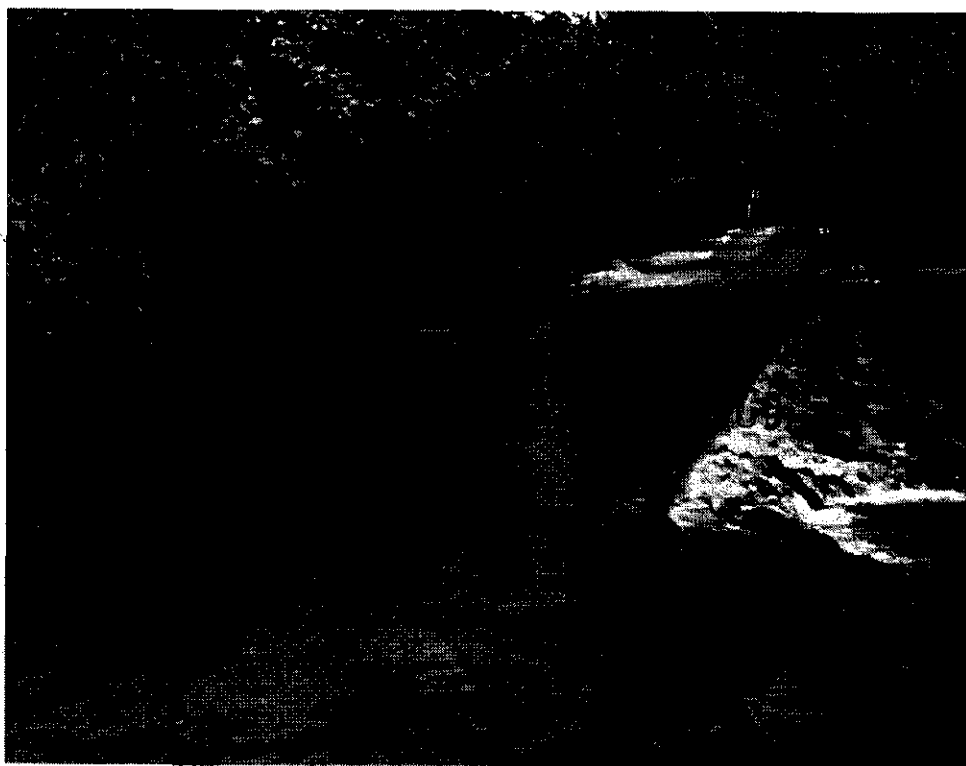


Figure 27: August 29, 1939, 11:55 AM. Ford below the National Zoo.
Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park
Service.

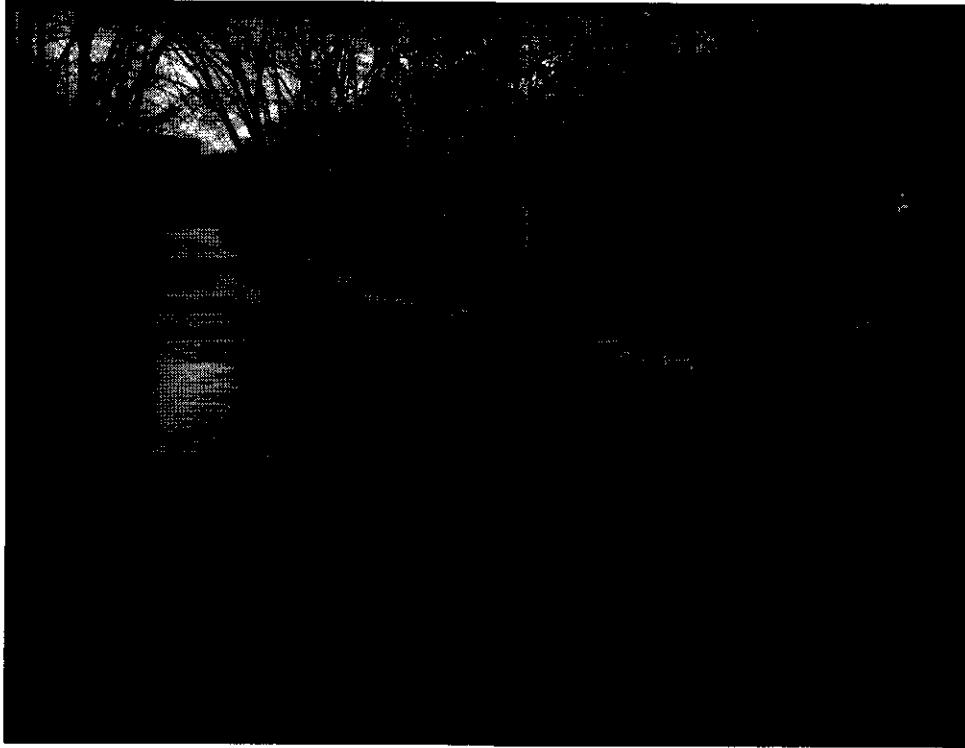


Figure 28: No date. Unidentified ford site. Probably near zoo, possibly Klinge. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

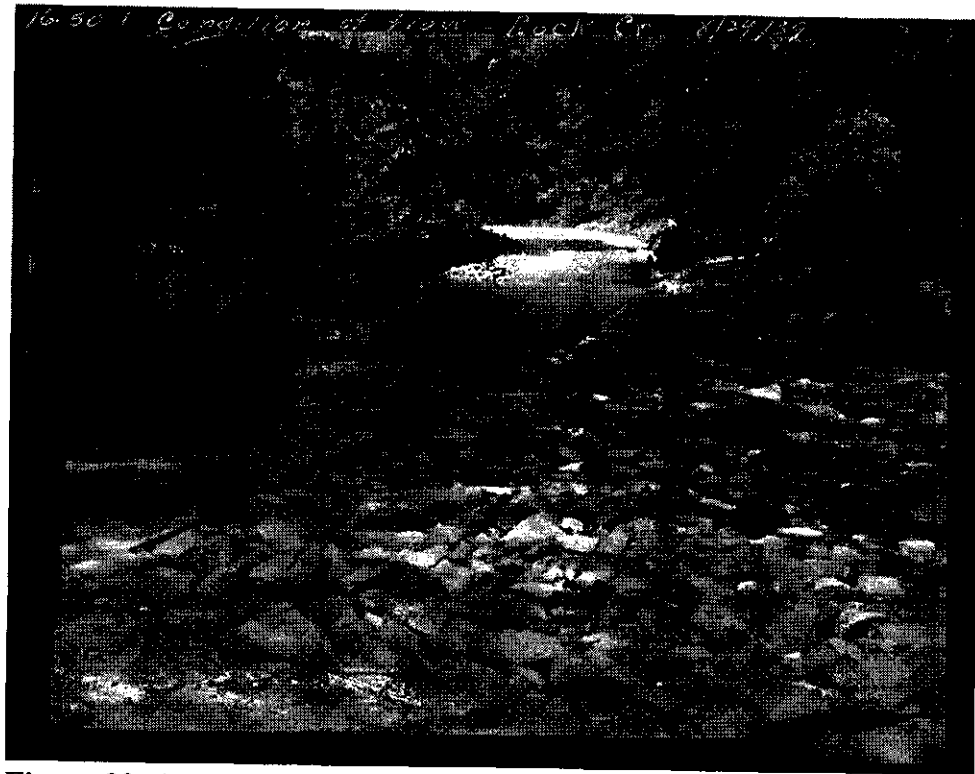


Figure 29: August 29, 1939. Milkhouse (?) Ford. "Condition of flow."
Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

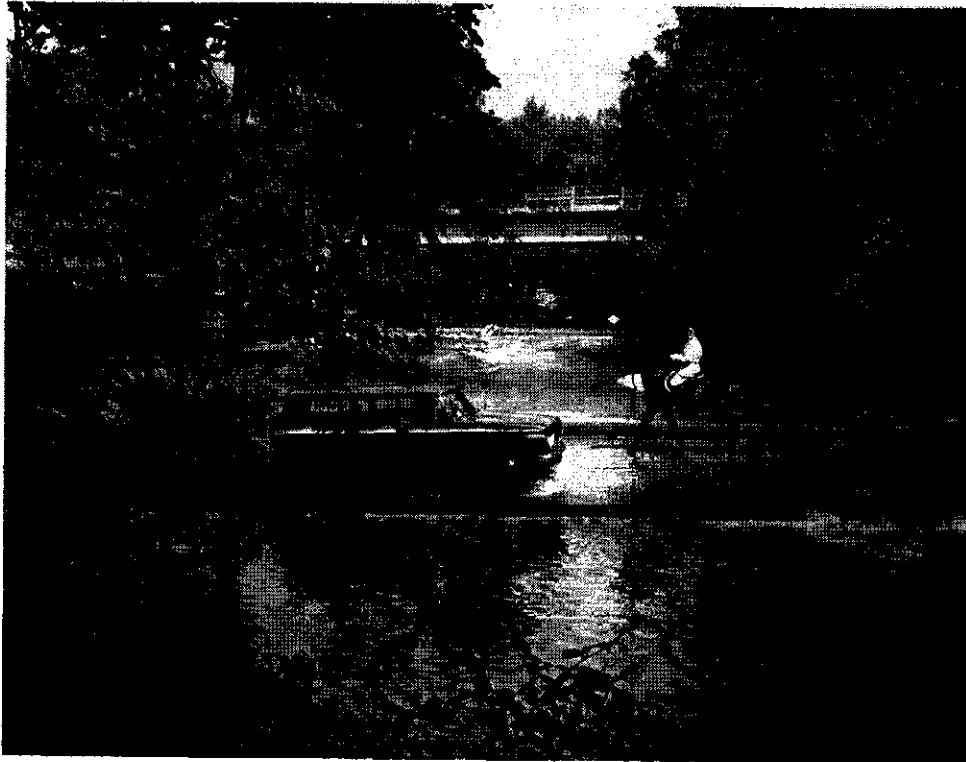


Figure 30: No date. Unidentified ford site (Klinge?). Shows car and horse with rider crossing ford. Courtesy of Rock Creek Park Historic Photographs Files, National Park Service.

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ADDENDUM TO:
ROCK CREEK PARK ROAD SYSTEM
Rock Creek Park
Washington
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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